

Hon Martin Pritchard; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Shelley Payne; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Wilson Tucker

*Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs —
Sixtieth Report — Petition No. 020 — Dog Act 1976 — Motion*

Resumed from 21 June 2023 on the following motion moved by Hon Peter Foster —

That the report be noted.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: I want to spend a couple of minutes talking about the sixtieth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs. It is based on petition 20 into the Dog Act. I will spend a couple of minutes talking about the committee, its role and on its expanding workload before I get to the report itself. I thank the committee members, Hon Peter Foster, Hon Sophia Moermond, Hon Stephen Pratt, Hon Tjorn Sibma and Hon Shelley Payne. The reason that I highlight this is that we have moved to a situation whereby we now accept e-petitions. I have mixed views on e-petitions. It is absolutely evident that it will increase the workload of that committee maybe a hundredfold. The reason I have mixed views on e-petitions is that petitions are an absolute necessity and something that should be offered to our constituents. They should be able to petition this place and have their petitions considered and often inquired into and reported on. In the past, that has been based on the old-fashioned way of people writing a petition, standing out the front of a shopping centre and physically getting signatures. It seems to me that that shows a degree of investment in the issue that requires that commitment. When it gets to that point, it naturally filters out those issues that may not be as—I do not want to use the word “important”; that is not the right word—more generally felt.

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The other thing I have a concern about regarding petitions is that often the petitioners identify an issue that people identify with, but then go on to put a resolution within the petition. Often a person can identify with the issue—in this case, with regard to petition 20 about dog attacks—but may not necessarily agree with the resolution that is also used usually put forward by the petitioner. I think we have a long way to go to working out how petitions can work. They are a very important device. It will be interesting to see what other people’s views on e-petitions are and whether we continue with that. I stress that I think it is important that constituents are given that opportunity. I do not want to denigrate them in any way, but in my view e-petitions seem to make it easy to increase the workload of the committee without necessarily increasing the import of those issues. That is just a personal view. I know there is some thought about how we might continue with e-petitions. They probably need to be continued with because it gives that opportunity, but in what format they continue with is something this house should look into.

The petition in this report is about attacks by dogs, which is a horrendous experience for anybody. Basically, the petition identifies the issue—I will talk more about that further in my contribution—and also puts forward suggested resolutions, one of which is stronger penalties for dog attacks. The petition suggests that dogs should be removed and destroyed and that there should be a compulsory education program for owners of dogs. That is probably where my thoughts lay.

Significant penalties exist within the Dog Act 1976—a penalty of \$10 000 for a dog attack that causes injury and a maximum penalty of \$20 000 if the attacking dog is a declared dangerous dog. Obviously, for those dogs that are declared dangerous, there should be a higher penalty because more care should be taken with them. My concern is that those penalties are significant but there continues to be a lot of dog attacks and bites.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: The question is that the report be noted. Hon Martin Pritchard.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: Thank you very much; I appreciate the indulgence of the house.

I turn now to how many dog attacks are reported. It is suggested that over 100 000 dog bites are reported annually, with an average of 2 061 requiring hospitalisation for treatment each year. That is significant. Further, dog bites account for 10 000 emergency department presentations of children; again, that is significant. Those are the reported dog attacks. There are a number of reasons it is viewed that the number reported is much lower than the real figure. The committee inquired into that through local governments. Local governments gave feedback that there are a number of reasons people do not report a dog bite or attack. One of the reasons is that the attack is minor in nature with no serious injury. A dog may have a propensity to bite, but may not cause serious injury, so those instances are not reported.

Often families will not report their own dog biting as it is part of their family; they tend to deal with it themselves. Often the people involved—the owner of the dog and the person who is attacked—resolve the matter themselves in some way. The payment of medical expenses and those sorts of things may be worked out. If that does not occur, a person who has been bitten or attacked often does not want to pursue court proceedings as it is a horrendous process in itself. Often dog lovers will not report it because they fear that the dog will be euthanised. Particularly

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if they are next-door neighbours, or within the same neighbourhood, they may be concerned about reporting because there may be repercussions from the owner of the dog. The committee also suggested that people may not have a good understanding of what a dog attack is: if a dog scares someone, is close and barks but does not bite, is that a dog attack? The other issue is whether there is an ability for people to report. People are not aware of the ability to report, or where to report, dog attacks.

The committee talked about how it may address these matters. I made a passing comment at the beginning of my presentation that I believe, as the committee does, that education is the way these matters need to be resolved. I say that because the penalties are quite significant. I do not think a person would say that if the penalty was a maximum of \$10 000, or \$20 000 if it was a declared dangerous dog, they would not take much care, but that they would take more care if it were a \$15 000 fine or anything more than that. It does not tend to work if the penalties are increased. Obviously, penalties have a role to play—I understand that—but people do not take less care with a view to what the penalty is. In most cases, dog owners will not know what the penalties are, so in my view increasing those penalties will not work. The path to resolving this is teaching dog owners their responsibilities and providing more education about the existence of penalties and how people can report and to where they can report. This is supported by local governments, which have responsibility for administering these regulations.

I want to touch on two other aspects. I mentioned whether it is an attack if a dog jumps on a person and barks or whether an attack is only when it bites. I have done a bit of doorknocking in my time and have come across home owners who have dogs. It is not always the fact that they bite; they can be very loud, very close, and can jump on people, and the trauma that causes can be horrendous and can stay with someone for a long time. One of the suggestions the committee made was that local governments either provide services for people to deal with that trauma, or at least point them in the right direction so they can seek that support themselves.

<015> S/2

I think that is quite important.

There is only one issue that I want to take up with the committee, and it is the suggestion that the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation should set some standards for the guidance of securing dogs. For the education of this committee, the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation does not have that responsibility. The Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation is more about making sure that local governments and government departments use the powers that this chamber gives them in an appropriate way, rather than being the judge and jury. Setting guidelines is more of a policy decision and the committee is loath to get involved in those policies. The Western Australian Local Government Association does a particularly good job in setting down guidelines, and it may be appropriate for it to turn its mind to it. I am sure that it probably has, but the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation does not. All in all, I thank the committee. I think it was a very balanced review of that petition and a very well written report. It gave some very good suggestions in a situation in which, I am sure, the introduction of e-petitions has increased its workload greatly and put it under constant stress. Again, I thank the committee.

Hon DAN CADDY: It gives me pleasure to rise to speak on *Report 60:Petition No. 020: Dog Act 1976* from the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs. This is a report into a petition that was tabled in this place by my good friend Hon Tjorn Sibma. I listened intently to the contribution by another good friend of mine, Hon Martin Pritchard. I have to agree with him on most of the things he said. I listened to the bit about e-petitions and have taken that on board. I think e-petitions are definitely something that we need to explore, but my opinion on the whole is that they are a beneficial addition to the way we go through the process. I agreed with what the member said about compulsory training, and also that the penalties are significant. The definition of a dog attack is an interesting one. It is not something I was aware of, but from what I read in this report in chapter 2, it is aggressively rushing at or harassing any person or animal. That is one definition of a dog attack. It is interesting, because there are many people who would not consider that an attack unless there was some sort of injury caused. He also said something about families not wanting to report. I grew up with German shepherds—lovely dogs. When I was a youngster, one of the dogs turned on me rather quickly. It did not actually bite me, but its paw hit my face. I had to have stitches in my face. The immediate reaction from my father was not, “Poor you.” It was, “Where you teasing the dog?” I said, “Well, yes, I was,” and that was that. That was the end of that discussion.

Hon Jackie Jarvis: Do you reckon it affected your modelling career?

Hon DAN CADDY: It did, Hon Jackie Jarvis! My modelling career was shot from that point on. It was interesting.

Anyway, this is the first time I have spoken on this report, so I will very briefly acknowledge the hardworking Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs and its staff, and thank them for their work on this report. They are a busy committee. Although this report is about one particular petition—I see my good friend, the chair of that committee, Hon Peter Foster, nodding his head—there are many reports that they are putting out that cover

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many, many petitions. The scope, if I may call it that, of this petition—the ask, if you like—was pretty specific. I am not going to read it all out, but essentially the petition read —

We, the undersigned ...

... ask the Legislative Council to investigate the introduction of:

stronger penalties to deter owners from disobeying regulations ...

the removal and destruction of a dog where it has caused serious physical injury ...

a compulsory education program for dog owners where an animal in their control has caused nuisance and fear to the general public.

As is noted in chapter 1.4 of this report, there was a comprehensive number of submissions. I have gone through and looked at some of them as this is something that interests me. I refer to the specific scope, or ask, of the petitioners. The report, and clearly the research done, by the committee, expanded greatly on—one may say complemented—the scope, or ask, from these people. I do not mean that in a derogatory way; I mean that in a very positive way. Sometimes, when someone is tasked with looking at these things, they need to go a lot further than just what the ask is in order to understand the context. An analysis of the registration system was in chapter 4 of the report, and the bulk of chapter 5 looked at dog enclosures for dangerous dogs. They were both very worthy topics to investigate that were not called for in the words of the lead petitioner, but were extremely important to provide context.

One thing I picked up in chapter 4 under the heading of “Centralised registration system” was that it refers to the Dog Amendment (Stop Puppy Farming) Act 2021 that we put through, which was assented to in December 2021. It states here that it is not yet fully enforced, which is true. The main purpose to amend the Dog Act 1976 was to prevent and stop puppy farming by regulating the breeding and sale of dogs in Western Australia. This is indeed the case. Our fantastic new Minister for Local Government and her department are working on it as we speak.

Just down from that, one thing that this report noted was that the department confirmed to the committee that muzzling requirements for greyhounds had been removed. I must say that, in the history of this state, that was well overdue. This is something that is important to me, and want to touch on briefly. When this particular piece of legislation referred to in the report was going through the other place, I know there was a heated debate about whether greyhounds, once they had finished their careers as racers and were being rehomed, should be required to wear a muzzle. I am not here to mock their concerns, but I am here to repeat some of the things that were said. I struggled with some of what I heard at the time. The muzzling of greyhounds once they finish their career, from what I can tell, came from a real misunderstanding that people have, that these majestic dogs are somehow born to run down “furry objects”. These were the words used by the former member for Darling Range, I think she was at the time, and echoed by the current Leader of the Opposition. He went so far as to ask why would we change something that has been in place for, “the last hundred or so years.” He is clearly not a student of history.

I am noticing that things change. At the moment, we are going through this process of changing from copper wires to fibre optics on the NBN. I am sure the Leader of the Opposition may well be happy to have the steel wires that were in place 100 years ago as well, but I digress. However, I come back to the muzzling and the change of provisions in the Dog Act for greyhounds. The reason I wanted to touch on this and speak about it today is we need to remain cognisant when it comes to these dogs of one extremely important fact, and that is the fact that like many large dogs—Great Danes spring to mind—they like to spend the bulk of their time lazing around despite their incredible speed.

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If members know anyone who owns one of these dogs, they will know that the dog will spend most of its time laying around on a couch if they let it. The critical thing that we absolutely always need to remember is that greyhounds love to run, but they are taught to chase. That is something I think was missing from the narrative in the Dog Act and in the way that we have treated greyhounds for so long. It is comforting to know that greyhounds that have finished their racing careers are basically being returned as pets. They do go through retraining, if you like. Greyhounds as Pets is one organisation that does this.

When we used to muzzle them, their second most defensive mechanism if they were attacked by another dog was taken away from them. Their main defensive mechanism, speed and getting from anything that attacks them, had already been taken away because greyhounds still had to be on a leash when in public. That was a problem. There was also the problem of public perception. When they are the only dogs, other than the five described breeds, that need to be muzzled, it gives the impression that these dogs are dangerous, and that is simply not the case. There

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are those restricted dogs; they are required to be leashed and muzzled along with other regulations. Greyhounds are not, nor have ever been, in the same category as those dogs.

Hon SHELLEY PAYNE: It gives me great pleasure to talk on the sixtieth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, of which I am one of five members, entitled *Petition No. 020—Dog Act 1976*. I would just like to thank our chair Hon Peter Foster; Hon Stephen Pratt; Hon Tjorn Sibma and Hon Sophia Moermond, who is on urgent parliamentary business at the moment, for their work and help on this report. As members have mentioned, this report is the result of petition 20, which was about dogs and dog attacks. I have to say, when I first had this petition, I was like “Is this really a problem? Is this something that we really want to spend our committee time on?” It was during the beginning of Parliament and there were so many issues. We were making decisions about what our committee should take time on. However, the more I read into this issue the more I realised that it is a real problem and is an important issue.

I will go through what happened last week in Perth with dog attacks. On 10 April, a dog was shot at Trigg Beach after it attacked an officer and two other dogs. On 8 April in Innaloo, two dogs attacked a woman who was walking a little Maltese Shih Tzu. Then on 7 April, a child’s dog was mauled to death by two other large dogs. This is something that is ongoing and is something that I think a lot of local governments struggle to deal with. Hon Martin Pritchard talked earlier about the number of attacks happening across local governments in Perth. Once I had a look at the statistics, it was pretty staggering. I am pleased that the government has stepped up to look at it and that it reviewed the Dog Act in 2019.

This report that we put together was not the result of a formal inquiry, but we did hold a few hearings. This report was tabled on 24 November 2022. The petition tabled in the house asked the Legislative Council to investigate stronger penalties for dog attacks, the removal and destruction of offending dogs and a compulsory education program for owners of dogs that have previously attacked people. As I mentioned, we had a number of hearings to collect information. We had hearings with Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries and also invited four select local governments. We wanted to have regional local governments as well as metro ones. We had the City of Albany and the City of Broome come to talk to us as well as the City of Swan and the City of Mandurah.

As I said, it was not a formal inquiry, but after we held these initial hearings, we decided that we did not need to hold a formal inquiry. On the basis of the evidence we received, we felt that an inquiry was not necessary but that the issue did warrant a report to Parliament on what we found out. Local governments are responsible for administering and enforcing the Dog Act. They can actually provide penalties of up to \$400 for dog attacks. However, if there is a prosecution as a result of that, there are penalties up to \$10 000 for an attack that causes injury and up to \$20 000 if the dog has been declared a dangerous dog. The act also provides for prison sentences of up to 10 years if a dangerous dog kills or threatens the life of a person.

We looked at these penalties because the petitioner asked us to look at stronger penalties. We decided on the basis of the evidence that the penalties are already significant and that increasing them would not likely act as any further deterrent. However, we felt that we really needed to push responsible dog ownership. There are a few local governments that are doing quite a few good things with education programs, and it was shown that their dog attacks were actually decreasing. One of the things we encourage to help with this issue is education and public awareness campaigns. We also encourage local governments to find ways to encourage participation by dog owners in such campaigns and dog training courses as well.

The other thing that members might remember is the Stop Puppy Farming Act that was passed in 2021. Part of that act was the creation of a new centralised dog registration system. It will allow for the uniform storage of information on dog attacks across the state. Currently, local governments are required to store information about dogs in their local areas, but if one dog moves from one local government to another and happens to have some issues, that information is not recorded. This new centralised dog register will be very good for making sure that we can track dogs and dangerous dogs as they move around the state.

Another issue that was raised was enclosures for dangerous dogs. That is something else that the committee looked at. When we looked at what was happening in other states, the requirements in Western Australia were found to not be sufficiently detailed or robust to guide people on what their dangerous dog enclosures should look like and how strong they should be. That is another area that we suggested could be strengthened and that perhaps some uniform guidelines could be created for local governments on these dangerous dog enclosures.

The committee wanted to thank the petitioner for bringing this issue forward, as well as the local governments that participated in those hearings. I might just quickly go through some of the areas that we looked at in the report that I have not had the chance to talk about as well as some of the comments that the committee made on this report. Some of them I have sort of briefly talked about already. The first section of the report dealt with penalties as a

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deterrent. As I said previously, the committee was of the view that there are sufficient protective measures available to local authorities to ensure that offending dogs do not pose a risk to the community if returned to their owners pending further action.

The second area we looked at was the registration system. As I mentioned, the centralised registration system will be developed by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries. It will be a really good system. We suggested that consultation should be done with local governments in developing the new centralised registration system. It should be out this year. Work and consultation has already been done on that. As I said, a lot of work has been done on that centralised registration system since the report was tabled in 2022.

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The next section in the report, which I talked about briefly, is about dangerous dogs and dog enclosures. Some of the committee's recommendations included having support across local governments for more uniform and detailed dangerous dog enclosure requirements. We suggested that the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries considers producing uniform guidelines to pass around to dog owners, so they have more guidance on developing dangerous dog enclosures.

The next part of the report discussed community education and training programs. The committee agreed with evidence given by local governments that greater participation in training for dogs and their owners will cause a greater reduction in the number of dog attacks than by increasing fines. We suggested that local governments should investigate ways to encourage dog owners to attend training courses, including reward-based incentives. They should also investigate ways to offer attendance of dog training courses in lieu of infringement notices. We know that we ask a lot of our local governments and I thank the local governments and rangers who are doing their jobs to implement this act. I thank them very much.

I will make one final comment on trauma services and looking at what we can do to provide information and access to trauma services to those involved in attacks. It is obviously very important to help people because attacks, as Hon Dan Caddy said, can be traumatic. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this report.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: I am happy to speak to this report today. I have found this committee interesting over my two terms in Parliament. I have not had a chance to be on the committee; however, I have tabled petitions and received responses from the committee requesting whether or not I would like to make a submission. As a member, I think that process is good. It is good that I was contacted after tabling a petition and was given the opportunity to tell the constituents who requested me to table the petition that there is an opportunity for them to write to the committee. I think people sign a petition and some people forget about it and are not interested after that, but others want to engage a bit further and find out what happens to a petition—whether or not the committee has reasoning behind why it did not pursue what was requested. I noticed in today's debate that we have found two slightly different opinions on e-petitions. I join Hon Martin Pritchard's view of e-petitions. I have reservations about whether it is a better process or whether it will create a better system. I think the interaction with community with paper and people having to physically sign it—every time I have done a petition I found that I have engaged further with a community member because of that interaction.

Hon Neil Thomson: What about the vast regions, where you can't—it's all right in regional cities.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: I take that interjection because, as I say, I am on the fence. I accept that the Mining and Pastoral electorate is massive. Yes, I might be able to get that one-on-one connection in the Kalgoorlie region, but if it is a statewide petition, I am probably not going to get that in Kununurra or Halls Creek. Other members in that area might. We have representation of lower house members in every electorate. There are members in that electorate who travel around and they go to events and they meet people. I think there is an opportunity for it to be successful. It has been proven in the past; it has worked. Whether we can say the sheer number of signatures that go on the e-petitions compared with the old system is a result of better interaction—I think the jury is still out on that.

Hon Martin Pritchard: I take you to the interjection you took before with regards to distances and such. I do not have any particular problem with the fact that you might have petitions that have 10, five, three—I can put forward petitions with one. I think they are just as valid.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Hon Martin Pritchard makes a very valid point. I think with this committee, it is noticeable that when a petition is tabled, there does not seem to be much difference between a small petition—I do not know whether that is different in the committee room about the weight of the petition. I would not ask the member to tell us that, because he is not allowed to. I have seen serious petitions that have had minimal signatures, but it was important for them to be brought to the house. It was brought to the house and it was raised in the house.

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I get called a Luddite quite a bit on a few things, particularly automation a lot of the time. I still line up in Woolworths and Coles, even if it is an hour and I have only got two things. I do not use the automated machines. I will not do it, despite my partner not being impressed by having to wait for an hour to get a loaf of bread. To me, that interaction and that one-on-one experience people get with the member asking them to sign the petition and explaining to them the process, rather than only the words that are there and a mass email that has been sent out to people who probably—who knows if they live in the electorate half the time or whether they are even in the state. I question whether we can fully understand that. I know it is new and we have to work through that process. Who knows, five years from now there might be proof that that is the case that they are 100 per cent legitimate. No worries—happy to do that. Right now we cannot say that. That is why I hesitate to go down that path.

I remember a former member of this place, Hon Robin Scott—I have not said that name in this chamber for a while. He was a member for One Nation, who chased me down Hannan Street with his petition. I do not know if it was for nuclear power—it was for something —

Hon Neil Thomson: Did you sign it?

Hon KYLE McGINN: No, I did not!

Hon Wilson Tucker: Did he catch you, member?

Hon KYLE McGINN: Easily! Excellent call. Hon Robin Scott may have been old, but he was fit.

What I saw was Hon Robin Scott sitting at St Barbara's Square with a table and a petition and sitting there all day. I have done that myself. That, to me, was really good engagement with the community. That was an opportunity to talk to the community about wide-ranging issues, but also an opportunity for members to get out there into the grassroots of the community and force that engagement a bit more. Sitting back on your computer and sending it out and saying, "Sign it", is not the same to me. I am not knocking it. I just think that if we were to add it up on the value side, I would still be inclined to go to the hard copy and see that engagement brought back. In my view, that would get members back out in their electorates and travelling around to the areas if they want to get a petition fully chock-a-block. It will be interesting to see how that progresses as the Parliaments progress and to see what other Parliaments do—whether they stick with the e-petitions or divert back. It has been heavily debated. At the start of this speech I said there are mixed views. People do not 100 per cent want to see e-petitions, but I take on board Hon Wilson Tucker and Hon Neil Thomson's view of the vastness. Of any electorate we would say Mining and Pastoral is one we would take into account for geographical challenges for travel. To get from one end to the other in a car would take two-and-a-half weeks, I think.

<018> Q/G

That is without stopping and actually talking to the community.

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon KYLE McGINN: Hon Neil Thomson cannot help himself. We were having a lovely little debate that was not at all antagonistic, and the member just had to go there. I could see Hon Neil Thomson out there with a hard copy petition getting signatures. We will hopefully see things change, morph, with some more rules and security put in place. Hon Wilson Tucker will probably be able to tell me some of the digital things that could be upgraded on e-petitions that would give more protection. I know nothing about computers but I know that security and that stuff is important, remembering, again, that people have to put personal details down. We have to take into account that the details are stored digitally. It is very intriguing to know that we are not immune to scams. I would be very concerned if there was a petition with 10 000 signatures signed digitally that had addresses or email addresses on it and it got scammed all of a sudden. It is a bit harder with a hard copy. The member hangs on to it and brings it into the chamber.

Hon Neil Thomson: We can talk about the Airbnb register.

Hon KYLE McGINN: I am not talking out of the realms here, am I? I think what I am saying is realistic. Would Hon Neil Thomson agree?

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY CHAIR (Hon Stephen Pratt): Order, members!

Hon KYLE McGINN: Once again, I am trying to engage in a decent debate and I just get nothing but political noise.

Hon Peter Foster: And negativity.

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Hon KYLE MCGINN: Exactly, Hon Neil Thomson runs down everything he can and does not talk about what we are talking about.

That is what I want to say about e-petitions. I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: Just to clarify my views, I would hate people to think that I disregard e-petitions; I do not. I put that on the record. I do not think anybody in the chamber is disregarding them at all. I know we are meant to be discussing a particular report but e-petitions came up. As I said, I just want to clarify.

First of all, I think the clerks check the eligibility of each person who signs a petition, whether it be e-petitions or others. Where I was more coming from was that with the introduction of e-petitions people would still feel aggrieved about issues and take the opportunity to do an e-petition. I was raising the concern that the committee can only deal with so much, and to give all petitions, e-petitions and physical petitions, the due respect and time they should get may be overwhelming because of the ease of doing an e-petition. I do not think the issues raised in e-petitions are any less heartfelt, but I think people would accept that it is easier to do an e-petition and garner signatures. I think the comment I made as an interjection was very valid; that is, I do not think the committee necessarily gives weight to the number of signatures on a petition. The members may do it subconsciously but I do not think they consciously give weight to that. I presume they have a discussion about the issue at hand and whether it would further the interests of our constituency if an investigation and report was put together and tabled in this place.

I just wanted to make sure that people did not think that anybody in this place would suggest that an e-petition was not valid. They are valid. It is just that the ease with which they can be done could soon overwhelm the committee. It would be a pity if all of the petitions that were brought before the committee were not given the time and due process that they should get. The chamber will have to work through this to make sure the processes we have in the future are appropriate for our constituency. I think everybody in this place does their utmost to engage with their constituency. It can obviously be more difficult when there are vast distances between constituents, and for that reason Hon Neil Thomson's view might be correct: an e-petition may very well assist regional people to discuss issues of common interest across those distances. But, as I said, I do not think it means that if one town has a small petition about something close to its heart, the committee will give it less weight. But it may assist in a commonality of issues across a vast distance.

I have done a few physical petitions in my time and that is no easy thing either, because we might gather signatures at a shopping centre but there are a lot of people in our constituencies. We all have large constituencies. Even the North Metropolitan Region is a significant area going from Perth through to Butler, so getting signatures through the whole area is still significant, even though I do not have to drive as far.

As I said, e-petitions may be the way of the future. I am certainly happy that they are being given a trial. They may prove to be the most expedient way of doing things. We may have to consider what assistance we give that committee if it is to deal with the extra number of petitions that come forward.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: The question is that the report be noted. I point out that we have had a broad-ranging debate about e-petitions, and I remind members that the report we are discussing is *Petition No. 020 — Dog Act 1976*.

Hon KATE DOUST: I think this is the first time in a while I have spoken during consideration of committee reports. I note that we are dealing with the sixtieth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs *Petition No. 020 — Dog Act 1976*. I missed the beginning of the discussion. I walked in when members were talking about the value of an e-petition, and I am making the assumption that this petition was delivered in that way. I have been in this place for a while and spent my first 12 years on the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs. When this discussion about e-petitions erupted, I remember Louise Pratt, currently one of our highly valued senators, did some work in this space on behalf of our committee while she was the chair. This matter first came up in the early 2000s, and I must say there was a high degree of opposition from the opposition of the day, which is still the opposition of the day. I was almost thinking that Hon Simon O'Brien's spirit had ventured back into this chamber this afternoon because even during the last term of Parliament he was one of the most vehement opponents of e-petitions and was always very concerned about their impact. Any negativity about opportunities to modernise always concerns me. When we mooted e-petitions during the last term of Parliament and we initially trialled them, it was all about changing the way we do business and how we better communicate with our community and enable them to let us know what their concerns are. Having that hybrid model of both paper and online petitions is a really great way to afford our constituents whatever option they want, and that is what we should be about. I hate to see where those who oppose e-petitions will be one day when we have to have a hybrid Parliament if we ever go back into a COVID-type arrangement, as was experienced in other Parliaments around the world. I think there are lots of challenges and we just have to be prepared to give things a

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go and let our stakeholders, our constituents, trial things to see whether they work for them and they can let us know how they feel about things in a different way.

Turning to the committee, the manner in which it does its work will hopefully evolve. I do not know what volume of petitions goes to that committee these days. When I was on it, it was essentially just a petitions committee and significant inquiries quite often arose from them.

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I note that perhaps we do not now have the volume or number of petitions. We might have the volume of individual petitions numerically with the number of signatures, and I do not know whether that places any influence on whether a committee bothers to inquire or seeks to close. There is a whole range of reasons why that happens. But petitions serve as a very important vehicle for our communities to have a direct say about issues in their communities and individual problems. I pick up that Hon Kyle McGinn talked about small numbers of signatures on petitions. Of course, a petition needs only one signature. I have seen a petition of last resort happen a few times. It may be that if we are coming back and looking at changes to something like the Dog Act, we might not have volumes of numbers; we might have only a few. That is my reference back to the petition, chair! We cannot just be a Luddite on these issues. We have to be prepared to be open to change. I think we are at a particular point in Parliaments all around the world at which people are trying to adapt and adopt technology and how best to utilise the technology that we have in play to better communicate with our constituents. In a state like Western Australia—we have just had that discussion about the tyranny of distance—why would we not be looking to engage with technology to better engage with our constituents? It is much better than driving two and a half weeks across part of the continent.

Whilst we are coming back and talking about the benefits of a petition in relation to the Dog Act of 1976, which perhaps needs to be looked at in its own way, I think it is very valuable. I am going to say I think it is important that this chamber has an opportunity on a regular basis to look at how it functions and how it needs to change its business practices, how it engages with its constituencies and how it manages its business. I do not know whether we get a genuine opportunity to have those debates in this house. It is a rare thing, and quite often it is maybe only once every four or five years, when we might review a standing order. I think that for every part of our process, perhaps we need to have an opportunity every once in a while, maybe during the committee stage, whereby we might throw up an issue like e-petitions and talk about the validity of the process, how people in the community are engaging and whether they like it. The success of this whole process will depend on whether people choose to go down the pathway of e-petitions. I know I tabled one myself today, and it means that someone in my electorate has raised an issue; they may not have wanted to afford the time and energy to go out and physically get signatures on a hard copy, but it might have been easier for them to generate the issue and get people engaged online. We should be doing what is in the best interests of our stakeholders to enable them to raise issues to communicate their concerns and views and to get the Parliament to respond in an appropriate manner.

Whether we are talking about the petition I tabled today about feral dogs, dingos or whatever it was, or this petition about the Dog Act, or any other matters we deal with, I genuinely hope that when this e-petition trial has ended, we fully support having e-petitions as a permanent option. I am not saying that we should get rid of hard copy at all—I like hard-copy petitions—but I think we need to enable people to have whatever options are on the table. If there are additional security measures, by all means, we will have a look at those, whether it is about validating access or individuals inputting the data, but they are the same problems we have had in the past. I remember taking up an issue with a past Clerk whereby we had people based in France signing off on petitions here in Western Australia. I remember asking whether we could restrict our petitions to only people who live in Western Australia. Apparently, we could not at that point in time. Maybe there are some other considerations that need to come into play about who can and cannot sign a petition, but I do not think we should be narrow-minded about how people can access them or how they utilise the opportunities that are available to them.

If we had not had an e-petition to deal with this concern around the Dog Act, would people have bothered to go through the physical timeliness of getting up a petition in hard copy? I think those are challenges for us as a chamber in how we became an enabler for our community. If e-petitions are one positive change, then that is great. We should keep them. Perhaps what we need to think about is how we can do other things in this chamber to make us more open and accessible to our communities. Is that perhaps something we need to have a conversation about? I know it is probably a bit of a misappropriation to use this time to talk about those things, but we do not have too many other opportunities, because everyone is so busy with legislation and other matters, so I thought to push the envelope, if you like, and add my two bob's worth to my colleagues' comments in support of e-petitions.

Hon WILSON TUCKER: I note that I do not have much time. We are talking about the Dog Act, I believe, but I think the dog is out of the kennel —

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Hon Kate Doust: He's off the leash and out the yard!

Hon WILSON TUCKER: Yes—when it comes to e-petitions, so I thought I would wade in on the topic. I am a big supporter of e-petitions. I put it in the form of direct democracy, maybe direct democracy light, but within our system of representative democracy, or perhaps it would be more accurate to label it as public interest technology. It is using technology within the public interest to serve the public interest. I think that any pathway whereby we can encourage representation and democracy is really a good thing.

I take the points made by Hon Kate Doust. I do not think we should be getting rid of the more traditional paper-based means by any stretch, but we should be looking at other options and methods of encouraging people to participate.

There were some comments previously about e-petitions potentially lowering the barrier of entry and maybe more signatures do not —

Consideration of report postponed, pursuant to standing orders.

Progress reported and leave granted to sit again, pursuant to standing orders.