

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000
Also by email: env@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Hon Swinbourn

RE: Petition No. 124 – Muzzling of Greyhounds

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission on the issues raised in **Petition No. 124 – Muzzling of Greyhounds**, submitted by Andrea Pollard and tabled on 27 June 2019.

The petitioners ask the committee to recommend that the Government follow the lead of the Victorian and ACT Governments and repeal the breed specific legislation that requires companion greyhounds to be muzzled in public in Western Australia. I note that since Petition No. 124 was presented the NSW Government has also repealed its greyhound muzzle laws for non-racing greyhounds.

Furthermore, the petitioners also draw the committee's attention to the fact that key animal welfare groups including the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA), Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), and the New South Wales Greyhound Industry Reform Council all support ending the requirement for non-racing greyhounds to be muzzled in public.

In general the RSPCA and the AVA both object breed specific legislation such as this, arguing that interventions to prevent dog bites and manage aggressive dogs should focus on the individual dog and the owner rather than a specific breed. There is no evidence to show that greyhounds as a breed pose any greater risk to the public compared to other dog breeds or mix of breeds. Indeed the RSPCA advise that compulsory muzzling of pet greyhounds in public only occurs in Australia and Northern Ireland. RSPCA Australia has not

identified any evidence of increase safety risks or incidents/ issues arising from the absence of compulsory muzzling of pet greyhound in public places in other countries.

Muzzling greyhounds is problematic on many levels, including for the welfare of the dogs themselves. Wearing a muzzle can be distressing if they are improperly fitted, or introduced too quickly to an unaccustomed dog. They may also prevent a dog from engaging in normal behaviour or from defending themselves against an attack from another dog.

While I acknowledge that attempts have been made to grant muzzling exemptions to greyhounds who have passed a behavioural test. These tests are problematic in and of themselves as they have not been validated for accuracy, repeatability or reliability.

Perhaps the greatest cost of all of the compulsory muzzling of greyhounds is that the muzzles contribute to a negative public misconception that greyhounds are aggressive. Each year hundreds of greyhounds are discarded by the racing industry and are need of homes. Removing muzzling laws would significantly help improve the image of greyhounds and therefore help increase rehoming rates.

It appears that the historic requirement for use of muzzles in racing animals harks back to the illegal practice of live baiting. This practice is all but a relic of the past and is not an adequate reason to mandate all pet greyhounds wearing muzzles. Overall pet greyhounds should not be subject to an extension of the rules of racing. Existing animal laws adequately provide for the control and management of dogs in public places.

In summary, the mandatory muzzling of greyhounds is not backed by evidence and has many shortcomings. It is clear that this breed specific piece of legislation is outdated and should be repealed. Thank you once again for the opportunity to make a submission on this important animal welfare issue.

Kind regards



Hon Alison Xamon MLC

18 July 2019