



The Honourable Matthew Swinbourn MLC  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Parliament House  
PERTH WA 6000

1 August 2019

Dear Mr Swinbourn

### **SUBMISSION RE PETITION NO 124 MUZZLING OF GREYHOUNDS**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee in relation to this petition. The petition asks for the removal of s33(1) of the *Dog Act 1976* that requires greyhounds to be muzzled in public.

These provisions do not effectively serve the public interest and negatively affect pet greyhounds and their owners because they:

- unreasonably discriminate against greyhounds as a breed rather than focusing on individual dog behaviour;
- are not based on scientific evidence, incident statistics or good practice risk management;
- have the effect of promoting a false stereotype of pet greyhounds and causing unnecessary fear in the community, while fostering a false sense of security concerning other breeds;
- discourage members of the public from adopting greyhounds exiting the industry at a young age, which in turn leads to a high “wastage” rate;
- adversely affect the quality of life of pet greyhounds and inhibit normal canine socialisation, reward-based training and exercise opportunities;
- mislead the public both as to the nature of greyhounds and the effectiveness of the measures claimed to address the purported risk;
- do not adequately incentivise the industry to ensure that all greyhounds used in the racing industry are suitably re-homed, and
- unnecessarily hinder the efforts of concerned community groups in improving the re-homing rates of greyhounds discarded by the industry.

Since the writing of the Act over 40 years ago, when greyhounds were in the vast majority only known as racing animals, greyhounds have become well known as a household pet. Currently, approximately 2,600 greyhounds are believed to live as registered pets in Western Australia. Almost all of these are ex-racing-industry dogs, although a significant number were “retired” without ever having raced.

Western Australia is now one of only four known jurisdictions (along with South Australia, Tasmania and Northern Ireland) that require greyhounds to be muzzled in public purely on the basis of breed. When announcing the removal of the law in Victoria, Minister for Agriculture, Jaala Pulford said, “I think the time has come. The evidence tells us that these are not dangerous dogs.”

A dog of any breed or size may, under certain circumstances, show aggression, chase, attack or bite people or other animals. There is no evidence that greyhounds are inherently more prone to such behaviour than any other breed kept by responsible owners, or that any disposition to do so is a result of unalterable genetics rather than an outcome of poor training and human attitudes, including severely provocative behaviour.

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In addition to the compulsory muzzle laws the *Dog Act 1976* also contains provisions that require greyhounds to remain on lead in public, even in designated dog off lead areas. These requirements are more than sufficient to ensure a greyhound is kept under the control of its owner.

#### *Shortfalls in current exemptions*

s33(1)b of the *Dog Act 1976* allows for a greyhounds to go muzzle free if it has completed a "Prescribed Training Programme".

Only the industry body (Racing and Wagering WA operating through its Greyhound as Pets Program (GAP)) is permitted to issue "Green Collars". There is no public information about what "training" is actually provided and the "Green Collar" is fundamentally not a training program but merely a temperament assessment .

Should the owner of a greyhound obtained from a rescue organisation other than GAP wish to have their dog exempted from the muzzle requirements, the GAP methodology is to take a dog that may only recently have found a family home, place it back in a kennel environment away from its new-found family for four days and then "assess" it at a point in time in the absence of any familiar person. This is a stress-test not imposed on any other breed of dog. The owner is charged \$175 for the assessment, which does not include any training to prepare the dog (or even advice to the owner on training to prepare their dog).

The assessment provides no indication of how the dog may behave in home environment. Because it is a point-in-time assessment rather than a training program, it doesn't address the potential for changes in a dog's behaviour after the assessment. Community based rescue groups often take on greyhounds that have 'failed' the Green Collar assessment yet go on to live happily in homes with other small animals.

There are estimated to be up to 1,000 greyhounds annually that become surplus to the requirements of the greyhound racing industry in Western Australia. Almost all of these are five years old or younger. These beautiful, gentle and sociable dogs should be able to spend the rest of their lives as a family's loved and loving pet without unfair and unnecessary restrictions placed on them.

Free the Hounds are aware that removal of the compulsory muzzling requirement is supported by the RSPCA, the Australian Veterinary Association, Racing and Wagering WA, all other community-based greyhound rehoming organisations and by the owners and foster carers of pet greyhounds in WA.

I refer you to the joint submission made by Free the Hounds and Greyhound Adoptions WA to the Dog and Cat Act review currently being undertaken by the Department of Local Government for a more comprehensive analysis of this matter.

Yours sincerely

Andrea Pollard  
Treasurer  
Free the Hounds Inc