



Tasmanian Dog Walking Clubs Inc.

Local Government Division
Department of Premier and Cabinet
lgd@dpac.tas.gov.au

25th September 2019

Dear Mr Shelton,

The Tasmanian Dog Walking Clubs thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the *Dog Control Amendment Bill 2019 (The Bill)*.

We represent 295 paid members across the Kingborough; Huon Valley; Derwent Valley; Sorell; Clarence; Glenorchy and Hobart council areas. We also have a state-wide Facebook membership of 1561.

In Tasmania there are over twenty-one Facebook sites dedicated to dogs. This allows us to communicate with a large number of dog owners.

Our mission is to promote responsible dog ownership and represent Tasmanian dog owners in the local and state government sphere. Approximately 44% of households in Tasmania own a dog¹.

We have addressed each part of *The Bill* in order for you to understand concerns that dog owners have and to try and avoid any unintended consequences.

4. Section 7 amended (Dog management policy)

We appreciate the tidy up of this section and the clarity that it affords in Councils being directed to invite public submissions for amendments to policy.

At times the invitation to comment can be limited in where it appears and in the past they have been missed by the dog owning public.

¹ Roy Morgan, Doggone it: pet ownership in Australia, <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/6272-petownership-in-australia-201506032349> accessed 26.10.18

5. Section 18 amended (Effective control of greyhounds)

We are pleased with the changes and clarity around “effective control” for greyhounds. This will remove so many restrictions for greyhounds and their owners.

The one concern we have in relation to access to Council Declared areas is what the Councils will do. We have noted that many Councils are now providing fenced off-lead areas and this has been a great step forward. However, there are also those Councils that appear to be less obliging. Recognising budget restrictions apply for some Councils, could we suggest that fenced sporting ovals make excellent off-lead exercise areas for dogs and greyhounds in particular

Of course, the use of ovals needs to be restricted to times when training and games are not being played. Good signage and communication with dog owners can manage this requirement.

Section 19 (a) (6)

Unfortunately, we do have incidents where people will make accusations against dogs and owners that are untrue and often done maliciously.

People, when frightened of dogs and hypersensitive to their presence will misinterpret a situation and their distress will give rise to behaviours that excite dogs. Screaming, running or waving arms around will excite dogs. Dogs can read these behaviours as a start to a game.

Yes, a dog running towards you can be frightening, but many people these days do not know how to read dog body language. The Delta Safe Dog program is run in schools and helps to address this lack of education and awareness. The Dogs’ Homes of Tasmania also has a school program but due to budget restrictions, this is limited to Hobart. It would be good if Government would support such programs. These programs rely on schools being willing to invite the programs into their classrooms and understanding their importance.

What protection can be afforded dogs and their owners if evidence of an actual injury is not required?

Where evidence clearly shows that an offence has occurred, a dog owner should be liable for compensation.

6. 19AB.

After section 19AA of the Principal Act, the following sections are inserted in Division 1:

Dogs must not injure or kill sensitive wildlife

The TDWC supports the increase in fines for dogs killing wildlife. We also support the use of DNA as a tool of proof in any legal case.

But will increased fines really work? There is a group of dog owners for whom wildlife, their dogs and fines mean very little.

The TDWC has concerns over whether Councils and other groups will use this section to limit access to public spaces for dog walking. There is a small vocal group in Taroona that tried very hard to limit dog access to beaches in Taroona and tried to use wildlife as a reason for maintaining the ban. Human activity in this area would have more impact on wildlife in this semi urban area than dogs. We would hate to see this section used as a back-door approach to cover areas that should stay within the remit of a Council’s Dog Management Policy.

The TDWC encourage the Government to assist Councils by supporting the employment of more Compliance Officers and in particular some with dog training skills and knowledge of animal welfare.

- Most Councils cannot physically cover their areas to address complaints and problem dogs, particularly on weekends and after hours.
- While most Councils provide staff with training around dog handling, some Position Descriptions found on-line, do not appear to require dog knowledge or animal welfare qualifications as a prerequisite. This also concerning where Councils run their own pounds.
- Many Compliance Officers also cover other areas such traffic.

More Compliance Officers with more relevant skills would allow for:

A greater coverage of the Council area.	
Time to form better relationships with dog owners and dog groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is often friction between COs and dog owners because of a lack of knowledge or confusion regarding laws around dogs. • It is the responsibility of dog owners to know the law however, some people need to having it explained. • An opportunity for conversation where dog owners would be more willing to highlight problems and raise the issue of difficult/problematic dog owners. • Potentially it would allow COs to deal with issues before they become major problems.
The ability to educate dog owners and the community in areas that dog owners frequent, especially dog parks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An opportunity to explain the rules. • An opportunity to educate about dog behaviour, body language which would help reduce the incidents of fights etc.. • An opportunity to teach recall, basic dog manners. • An opportunity to discuss problematic behaviour and refer to appropriate trainers.

<p>The ability to audit dog registrations and physically check residences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to ensure dogs registered and that dog number are correct. • Check backyard breeders and report to RSPCA if necessary. • Check for dangerous dogs. • Check compliance around Dangerous Dogs • Talk to owners about appropriate fencing – particularly near penguin colonies and other sensitive sites. • General animal welfare checks.
<p>The time to spend doing more comprehensive investigations of dog related incidents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The gathering of DNA evidence will take time. • Time to properly record and investigate all incidents so that problem owners can be managed and/or dealt with appropriately.
<p>Time to manage dog off-lead areas and to ensure that correct legible signage is onsite, fencing is secure, ensure poo bags are available and that the facility is in good order.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some councils have changed their declared areas without updating signage. • New signs in one Council are actually hard to read because of the colours used. • Damage to fencing can occur accidentally(fallen trees) or deliberately. • Despite Council efforts, poo bags run out and surprisingly people pinch whole rolls. • The more attractive and well-kept an area is the more likely people are to use it.

We would ask that consideration be given to the installation of cameras in areas where wildlife like penguins are at risk. Along with appropriate signage this would provide useful evidence about attacks and act as a deterrent.

We support efforts to map areas of sensitivity so that resources such as fencing and signage can be appropriately installed and so that dog owners know the areas to be avoided. Most dog owners are animal lovers do not seek to harm wildlife.

In conclusion the TDWC supports this Bill but with some reservations around its efficacy in relation to protecting wildlife and perhaps providing a way for some groups to limit or reduce dog access to public spaces.

We feel that we have made some suggestions that would provide a more permanent and sustainable solution to protecting wildlife.

In regards to greyhounds, these amendments are most welcome. The TDWC would prefer to see a cessation to greyhound racing in the future. We believe that the racing industry has lost its social licence and has little to no public support. There appears to be no movement on the numbers of litters produced nor on the numbers of greyhounds euthanised. We are also aware that greyhounds from interstate are being rehomed by the Tasmanian Greyhound Adoption Program, removing spaces for local greyhounds to be rehomed.

The TDWC thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the amendments.

Kind regards,

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