

Mr Greg Piper,  
Member for Lake Macquarie  
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I am writing to express my concern about the present situation in which small hobbyist dog breeders find themselves.

I am a person with over fifty years involvement in various dog activities including the keeping and breeding of purebred dogs as a member of Dogs NSW. I am an accredited International Dog Judge for All Breeds of dogs with extensive judging experience throughout Australia and Internationally. I am also an accredited assessor for Local Government of dogs thought to be a restricted breed. I also served as a senior Clinical Psychologist for over 30 years, many of these as Principal Clinical Psychologist for the NSW Department of Health which I mention because a major concern is the mental health of Community Members.

As a result of my extensive involvement in the Dog World I frequently have other hobbyists approach me with their concerns and anxieties concerning the keeping of dogs for breeding and showing.

At the present time the NSW Government is attempting to control the keeping and breeding of dogs in situations which are below standard and place the wellbeing of dogs in jeopardy with an emphasis on large scale operations often referred to as "puppy farms". To achieve this the Government has financed the RSPCA to carry out audits on breeders' compliance with Department of Primary Industry requirements.

The objectives of the Government should be fully supported. However, the problem appears to be that these Audits are targeting hobbyists who are easily found because of their involvement with organisations demanding a high level of compliance with best breeding practices. The DPI regulations were originally aimed to control "puppy farmers" and require mountains of record keeping to ensure the welfare of animals. Hobbyists with vast experience are finding it extremely arduous and difficult to have this paperwork up to date and many are now questioning whether they will be able to continue with a hobby they have devoted their lives to for many years. For a significant number their whole life has centred around this activity.

I have had numerous breeders raise with me their concerns regarding their future in their chosen hobby. Some have already had their breeding bitches desexed and some are talking suicide if they find that they cannot continue their hobby.

The situation is exacerbated by the way some audits are conducted. Inspectors arrive unannounced and demand entry into a person's home if, as many hobby breeders do, keep dogs in their home. A major problem for many is that the Regulations are sometimes ambiguous or do not adequately spell out requirements. This leaves much room for interpretation by the inspector and numerous differences in interpretation are reported. It seems to be impossible to get an official statement about just what the RSPCA require to satisfactorily pass the audit.

The problem is made worse by the fact that some regulations are patently illogical and some do not conform with what veterinary associations regard as being necessary.

An example of an illogical regulation, that even a person in the street with no dog experience would find to be crazy, is the mandated height for pens/fences of 1.8 metres regardless of the breed of dog being kept. This means that if a Chihuahua is kept a fence that is 1.8 metres high is required, the same as that required for a Great Dane. This regulation also is open to interpretation as to the required height of fencing of a house yard which dogs use for exercise. The regulation does not actually specify a height for this and it is reported that some inspectors are demanding that this also be 1.8 metres high. This of course would be contrary to the height of boundary fences permitted by a number of Local Government Authorities.

It is also reported that a number of Inspectors are requiring Vaccine regimes that would not be recommended by Veterinary Practitioners although the breeder is able to obtain a statement from their Veterinary Practitioner that some procedure is inadvisable.

These are just examples of many aspects of the regulations with problems as to their enforcement and validity.

I am aware that the Government has established an Advisory Committee to review these regulations but although this committee agree that some regulations should be changed any concrete action is slow in happening.

The main issue I wish to raise is the effect that these regulations, and the method of enforcement, will have on the mental health of many members of the community. I have real concerns that there could be suicides among those whose whole life has revolved around the ethical keeping and breeding of dogs and the feeling of helplessness in being able to take any action to continue with their hobby. These would be extreme examples of the high degree of anxiety experienced by numerous persons which is impairing their mental health.

It would appear that only large scale operators with sufficient funds will fully conform with requirements and hobbyists will be a thing of the past thus removing a supply of healthy, well socialised family pets.

It would be appreciated if you would consider the issues raised in this letter and take any possible action to alleviate the situation. I would be happy to further discuss any issue raised should you wish.

Kind regards

Myron Arthur  
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