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HANSARD

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SELECT COMMITTEE ON DOGS AND CATS AS COMPANION ANIMALS

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:04): I rise to speak on the Select Committee on Dogs and Cats as Companion Animals and note this came about because of a proposed bill by the member for Fisher. There has certainly been a lot of interest over the years in how companion animals, especially dogs and cats, are treated, and how people perceive what it is necessary to do when you pick up a pet.

We see the wanton waste that happens and the tragic loss of life at times of pets when people think there is a cute little pup or kitten in the window. They take it home, and it might be a Christmas present or something like that, and then they realise that there is more to owning a pet than just having something cute and fluffy looking at you every morning. There is certainly a lot more to it.

One point I wanted to make during the establishment of this select committee was that we did not enforce any issues with regard to working dogs and especially with regard to the trade in farm animals, especially pups that could be bred for trade between neighbouring farmers, but also in relation to purpose-bred dogs like guide dogs and the like. I am pleased that the committee stuck to its core business of looking at companion animals and, in our definition, essentially, pets.

What happens in rural areas especially is that there is a lot of trading. When people know that someone has a good dog and a good bitch, and when they know that there is a litter of pups coming along, they want to be able to get hold of those pups so they can work their livestock. I did not want to see an impediment to that kind of trade, especially in rural areas, although we do acknowledge that the welfare of those animals is certainly high on the agenda.

Some interesting issues came up during the sitting of this committee. We saw a couple of breeders come under scrutiny, and rightly so, for their activities. I know there was one in the Riverland where there were some issues with the breeding of pets and also one, sadly, in my electorate, down towards Milang.

The problem we have is that, apart from the trade in animals that can be done through pet shops, some people do it from car boots and that sort of thing. Someone might respond to an advertisement for a pet, thinking, 'Yes, I will have one of those', and, because the breeder may not necessarily want the buyer to see how these

pups or kittens are bred, they will meet them somewhere in a car park and do the deal out the back of a car.

There has also been a trade of, I guess you could call it, designer dogs. People basically put their orders in and it may be pet shops, even interstate, that say they want a certain breed or a certain crossbreed because that is the trend that there is a demand for. Some of these pups can sell for many hundreds of dollars if not approaching \$1,000, so you will see people putting breeding animals through breeding programs that are totally unsustainable. It puts a lot of pressure on dogs and it is totally wrong. It causes dogs to breed continuously, just so someone can profit unscrupulously from this trade.

I was very pleased to be a part of this select committee. I just want to go through the specific recommendations that relate to our terms of reference. The first recommendation was about introducing an enforceable standard for the breeding of companion dogs and cats. I think that is where we have to get at the core of the issue and make sure that people do follow the appropriate standards for breeding.

The second recommendation is around introducing a licensing scheme for breeders of companion dogs and cats, and this will cut out some of those unscrupulous traders. The third recommendation is to require mandatory inclusion of breeder's licence numbers and animal's microchip numbers in all advertising and at purchase point. What that will do is basically licence the trade so that people can see that these are legitimate breeders and, obviously, with a microchip there, the animal can be tracked along the way.

Our fourth recommendation is to require minimum qualifications for pet shop, breeding establishment and pound/shelter staff. From what I understand from our recommendations, at least one person operating that pet shop has to have a certain certificate and that has to be on display so that people can see that those qualifications have been adhered to, and the other staff can work under the guidance of that.

Recommendation five: move forward the recent review into the South Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Management of Animals in the Pet Trade, and I think that is self explanatory. Number six: require vendors to provide a cooling-off period prior to handing over a companion animal. This reflects on comments I made earlier in regard to people who think, 'There's a lovely kitten or a nice fluffy pup in the window and isn't that a great thing,' but people really need to think about how they manage these animals because, as we saw during our tours of shelters, and the RSPCA etc., people suddenly realise that they cannot manage the animals. Recommendation seven: develop industry standard information on pet ownership responsibilities, to be disseminated prior to sale. That reflects on my previous comments about the many responsibilities that pet owners need to have.

Recommendation eight: require dogs and cats purchased at any venue (breeder, pet shop, online, market etc.) to be vaccinated at the appropriate level for age and treated for worms and other parasites, microchipped; and require cats purchased at any venue (breeder, pet shop, online, market etc.) to be desexed prior to sale, or a

commitment to do so undertaken at point of sale. Any person purchasing a cat for breeding must have a valid breeder's licence.

It is interesting that, while the committee was sitting, sadly we had to put down our pet cat at home. He had been run over or fallen off a tree or something and he was severely injured. We went to the Animal Welfare League and picked up a kitten and I thought, 'This is a pretty expensive cat—\$195,' but, when I look back, I think that when buying a pet it is probably the best money we could have spent because all the vaccinations had been done, it was microchipped, it was tattooed and all ready to go and, for the benefit of the committee, to whom I used to talk about the life of this kitten, it is doing marvellously well, and it is a great little pet at home.

Recommendation nine: require councils to prepare separate cat management plans. I think that this is quite an important recommendation. At the moment councils have to prepare a dog and cat management plan. I think it is absolutely vital that a separate cat management plan to the dog management plan be prepared because there are so many more stray cats in society, and there are all these different plans that different councils use in managing their stray animal populations and, certainly, I take my hat off to what Mitcham Council has done in its plans. I have urged some of the local governments in my electorate to take a similar approach.

Another approach we saw interstate was in regard to recommendation 10: urge councils to adopt the 'found pets' initiative to facilitate the return of pets to their owners. In evidence we heard that this was a great initiative where found pets are put online—out there on the web for all to see—and this created far quicker response times, and these animals returned to their rightful owners.

Recommendation 11: initiate public awareness programs into responsible pet welfare and ownership issues amongst the general public, with a particular focus on children; and the issues associated with irresponsible pet ownership and the nature and extent of the stray cat problem.

I certainly recommend the report to people who are interested in the welfare of dogs and cats as companion animals because we all should be interested in their welfare; they are fantastic companions. Without putting too heavy a burden on society, we still must do the right thing, in a regulatory way, to make sure that our animals are well looked after and that individuals fully know their responsibilities. As I have repeated a couple of times in my contribution, it is not just about having a lovely little animal at home; there is a lot of care over the next 14 or so years the animal may live, and people need to accept their responsibilities.

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