

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

THURSDAY 19TH MAY 2016

DOG AND CAT MANAGEMENT (MISCELLANEOUS) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Adjourned debate on second reading.

(Continued from 23 March 2016.)

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (16:33): I rise to speak to the Dog and Cat Management (Miscellaneous) Amendment Bill 2015. As the member for Morphet has indicated, I was a part of the select committee into companion animals. The member for Morphet was on the committee, as was the Minister for Education, the late Bob Such (who brought this to the house) and the former member for Mitchell.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: And me.

Mr PEDERICK: And the Deputy Speaker, sorry. I am doing this off spec, without notes, so forgive me, Deputy Speaker, the member for Florey. There is a whole range of issues that have to be managed in relation to dogs and cats. It is one of those issues, even though generally it is a council-managed issue in an electorate, it is amazing how many calls come into an electorate office about. I am sure that would be the case right across the board. It does not matter what party or group you represent or if you are an Independent, I am sure every electorate office has their dog and cat calls that come in.

Some councils have become far more proactive in how they manage cats especially. I know the Rural City of Murray Bridge has got on board with microchipping programs, which are part of this bill, to sort through a cat issue in the local area. It is good to see most councils taking up their full responsibilities under the Dog and Cat Management Act. In regard to the desexing of animals and that kind of thing, something needs to be done so that we can manage the populations into the future. You do not want to be over-run because that brings up a whole heap of health problems and management problems, to name just a couple of areas.

Sadly, a couple of years ago I had to put our pet cat down when he had an injury, because we have a fairly hard policy on the farm. We picked up our next cat, Spooky 2, from the Animal Welfare League. I think we had to spend about \$195 and I thought, 'That's a fair bit to pay for a cat,' but then I realised it was desexed, microchipped, the whole box and dice, and we were doing it properly. He has become a great cat. In fact, he is a bit like a homing pigeon. We lost him for five days around Christmas and I thought he had left the building completely, but one morning at about 5.30 he turned up scratching the back window, so he did a great job in finding his way home.

I want to talk about issues around assistance dogs, which are part of this bill. The bill talks about the groups that can accredit assistance dogs. The groups that are the prescribed accreditation bodies are: the Dog and Cat Management

Board, the Royal Society for the Blind of South Australia, the Guide Dogs Association of South Australia and Northern Territory Incorporated, Lions Hearing Dogs Incorporated, and any other person or body declared by the regulations to be a prescribed accreditation body.

An issue was raised recently in regard to a residential aged-care village in my electorate. I am involved with it and there is an issue, because pets are not allowed to be kept there, and that has been a rule for around 30 years. We had an issue where some people have moved in and said that they have a hearing dog. However, when we did the investigations we realised that it was not a hearing dog. It was used for the same benefit, but it was not accredited. It would have been fine if it was a fully accredited dog. That would have been no problem at all because it would have been exempt from any ruling, so we are working through and around the issues involved with that.

That example just goes to show that everyone needs to be aware of what is allowed and what is not allowed in regard to what you can have on a premises. Before people get a bit excited and say, 'You're infringing on my rights,' or this and that, what they need to understand is that we pass legislation in this place for a reason, and that reason is to try to make it as black and white as we can in regard to pet ownership and where you can have those pets and where you cannot.

I mentioned microchipping, and there are great moves being made around the place, and certainly a lot of local government sectors are getting on board. Some of the new local councillors, since the last council election, have got right on board to make sure their councils are doing the right thing in relation to microchipping; otherwise, you end up with so many stray cats especially around the place, which causes havoc and is not good enough for society as a whole. That is certainly a good thing that we need to keep on board.

The bill provides for desexing for all companion cats and dogs. Further on, the bill deals with the breeding and sale of dogs and cats and the registration of breeders and prescribes offences for breeders of dogs and cats who are not registered. I joined the Select Committee on Dogs and Cats As Companion Animals because I wanted to make sure that working dogs—or, according to the definition that will be moved in amendments today by the minister, livestock dogs—will be exempt because farmers do trade dogs between each other. Someone might have a good dog and they might want to put a bitch with that dog and get some really handy pups and sell them to a neighbour.

I was concerned and that is why I joined the committee. I am wondering whether the minister in either her summing up or at the committee stage, if we go into committee, can confirm whether or not livestock dogs will need to be microchipped. Obviously, they will need to be exempt from desexing; otherwise, there is not much point having them as part of the rural framework. As the member for Stuart indicated, they are such an asset to a farmer's life. You can have a good working dog that will beat three or four men—or women. Let's not be sexist.

The Hon. S.E. Close: Or five or six women.

Mr PEDERICK: No, I'm not going there. They can do a great job. They can run down the backs of sheep in the yards and save so much time. If you have a good dog, they can half think what the sheep, especially, are doing and get around them. There are good cattle livestock dogs that can do similar things. Cattle can be pretty ordinary beasts to handle at times, and you have to be on your toes. Some dogs have paid a fairly high price dealing with cattle, as have people in the rounding-up of cattle, as well.

They are a vital part of the landscape, whether you are on the inside country or the pastoral country, which is most of the country that the member for Stuart looks after. They are vital to the make-up and to make sure things work in rural areas. There are problems plaguing the state at the moment with the downturn of so many other industries, yet agriculture is holding up because beef is on a bit of a run at the minute and lamb is holding up quite well after quite a while in the limelight.

That is good to see because we have seen dairy basically collapse in the last few days under a global glut of milk. That is going to cause some real issues for our dairy farmers with Murray Goulburn and other companies reducing their contracts retrospectively. I have problems with that from the start. I am not sure how you can get away with that, but things will roll out in the next couple of months and we will see how that does pan out.

In regard to microchipping, desexing and the breeding and sale of livestock dogs, I would ask the minister to confirm in her remarks whether those issues are going to be dealt with as exemptions under the act itself or in regulations under the act. I just want to make sure that farmers and livestock owners have the opportunity to do what they have done for years, not necessarily as registered breeders.

Early in the piece, when this debate was going on—and it could have been nearly two years ago—I was starting to get some phone calls from registered sheepdog breeders saying, 'We are really concerned that we are getting caught up in this.' I am certainly concerned that mixed messages were coming from the different consultation meetings around the place. That is the main concern I have. All the other parts of the bill seem quite sensible for companion animals, but I must stress that livestock dogs are a whole other sphere that we need to make sure we keep so that we can make this great state operate. To be frank, I am not sure how you would police it any way if you made it so hard for livestock breeders to get their dogs.

I must make mention of people who are doing the right thing. One of my staff has a golden retriever. His name is Bear and he is four months old. I note that usually they are desexed at around six months, but he needed some surgery, so Bear woke up whole this morning but he is going to bed tonight missing a few bits. That is the right thing to do. He is a lovely golden retriever, and I am sure he will recover in the next couple of days. But this is all about—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: He might be psychologically scarred.

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, he may be psychologically scarred; I think his owner is slightly, but she will be fine and Bear will get over it. That is a small price to pay

for responsible dog ownership, especially if you have a large dog like a golden retriever. I am sure he will have many happy years once he gets over this minor operation today.

I am keen to see this bill go through, but I am also very keen to hear what the minister has to say about exemptions for livestock dogs. I note that it has been carefully worded so that we do not get the wrong working dogs brought into the bill, or the act when it becomes an act, and it is quite clear that we are talking about livestock dogs. I am just seeking that clarity to make sure that sheep farmers and cattle farmers in this state are looked after and keep operating as they have done for many years.