

Paper on the Problem of Unwanted and Neglected Companion Animals

This Paper seeks to identify the causes and to offer suggested solutions for discussion.

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About the Author:

Beverley Manners was a pure breed dog breeder and exhibitor for 31 years before changing direction in 1990 to develop a new breed now globally recognized as the Australian Labradoodle. She founded the Rutland Manor Labradoodle Breeding and Research Centre in Victoria Australia with the goal of developing a new dog breed that would avoid the major health problems facing pure breed dog populations across the world.

Beverley founded and served on the first official Registry in Australia and internationally for the Australian Labradoodle and she pioneered mandatory genetic health testing and DNA identity profiling of cross breed dogs in Australia. She has spent her life working tirelessly in the pursuit of a better life for animals and has contributed to educational programs to foster responsible pet ownership. Her breeding experience is not restricted to dogs, having bred and exhibited pure bred Longhair (Persian) Cats, Stud Angora Goats, Registered Australian Quarter Horses and Black Angus Cattle. She has rescued, rehabilitated and re-homed countless animals including dogs, cats, and horses.

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INTRODUCTION

(1)

Identifying The Problem

The long standing problem of unwanted, neglected and abused animals continues to escalate, posing financial, legal and ethical problems for Shire Councils, City Halls, animal welfare groups, private citizens and animal lovers across the world who are outraged and distressed at the increasing numbers of neglected and abandoned animals and the spiraling euthanasia rates of over crowded animal shelters.

50,000 cats are impounded annually throughout Victoria alone, the smallest State in Australia and 35,000 are euthanized each year (at a cost of around \$5 million per annum).

Time and resources of local law enforcement agencies and animal welfare groups are stretched beyond the limit. Animal liberation extremists in their zeal frequently break the law and place additional strain on the already over burdened courts.

The system for want of a better word, is failing us.

Identifying the Causes of the Problem

- (i) Individuals and businesses can currently breed domestic companion animals with no prior experience in animal husbandry as it applies to the animals they breed. The resulting animals are often poorly bred, with little to no health testing of their parents, kept in sub standard environments and far too often with little to no socialization, itself a pre cursor to faulty temperament. Whether by ignorance or lack of caring, the results are nonetheless the same.
- (ii) People who breed companion animals are currently not required by law to have any understanding of genetics, nor of inherited and environmentally induced diseases and behavioral problems in the animals they breed. It is reasonable to conclude that a percentage of surrendered or dumped companion animals is due to the onset of disease including Hip Dysplasia and other OCD's which require expensive veterinary treatment or surgery which the owner can not afford. A further percentage can be attributed to behavioral problems caused by the lack of an environmentally enriched program being provided by the breeders for the puppies which they produce.

- (iii) Breeders can and do on-sell entire (non desexed) animals to other inexperienced people with no restrictions imposed, who in turn carry on the cycle of indiscriminately reproducing even more animals while themselves not being educated as to best breeding practice.
- (iv) Research indicates that desexing (spey/neuter) voucher programs have failed, with less than 40% of pet owners availing themselves of the vouchers.
- (v) Pet Shops encourage impulse buying, especially at Christmas and holiday times. Customers rely on second hand information about the puppies they purchase, which is passed on by pet shop staff. There is no verification provided as to the breed or cross breed of the puppies purchased. When the animal grows larger than expected, or exhibits the wrong kind of temperament it can not be returned to the pet shop as it could be to a responsible registered breeder. Surrendering the animal to shelter or dumping it can be seen by the owner as the only other option available to get rid of pet who has now become a nuisance, or a danger to the family and its children.
- (vi) Pet Shops provide a ready market for puppy mills and people breeding puppies behind the scenes in suburban back yards or hidden away out of sight on isolated farm properties.

The RSPCA's Definition of a Puppy Mill or Puppy Farm.

"Puppy farms

A puppy mill or puppy farm is a mass-production facility that breeds puppies for profit. The puppies and their mothers are often kept in very poor conditions.

Breeding animals may be continually mated and kept with their puppies in cages and never allowed out to exercise, play, have companionship or even go to the toilet.

Puppies born in puppy farms often have long-term health and behavioural problems as a result of poor housing conditions, poor maternal nutrition and a lack of adequate socialisation during the crucial first few weeks of life."

- (vii) Dealers who purchase puppies from puppy mills and the 'hidden away' breeders to on- sell to pet shops, routinely advertise in newspapers across the nation, wanting to pay cash for puppies from FIVE weeks of age which is a blatant disregard for current legislation which prohibits the sale of puppies and kittens under eight weeks of age. These out of sight, out of mind Miniature sized puppy factories sell to dealers or directly to pet shops. This practice has not been policed for at least fifty years. Puppy mills are not restricted to 'mass numbers' and the plight of thousands of dogs across the nation being bred in small numbers in the squalor of individuals' back yard sheds and on farm cages needs to be addressed. Below, a typical advertisement appearing in newspapers across the country every week –



- (viii) Pet Shops offer a mere seven day health warranty/guarantee which is acceptable practice according to current legislation. When a companion animal develops a disease later on as a result of poor breeding practice or bad luck, there is no recourse to the owner other than expensive veterinary care or surrendering the animal to a shelter. Most ethical breeders on the other hand, offer a two year health warranty/guarantee on the stock they breed and will offer to take the dog back, to rehabilitate and rehome it when a family can no longer keep the animal.

Solutions – Punish, Educate or Legislate?

1. Perhaps a combination of the above may be worthy of discussion. Some of the proposed solutions put forward in this section i.e. Identification Certificates for each animal, and blood typing have already had precedents set in Australia within the codes of practice for the breeding of exotic frogs and Stud Book Thoroughbred race horses to name two.

PROPOSED LEGISLATION - Government Licensing of Breeders

- (1) That domestic animals may only be lawfully bred by Government-Registered Breeders as distinct from breeders registered with breed clubs or breed associations which have historically failed dismally to monitor or enforce their own codes of practice for the breeding keeping and raising of domestic companion animals registered with their societies or organizations.
- (2) That a Government Registered Breeder's licence be granted subject to the following –
 - a) That any person wanting to breed companion animals be required to attend and complete a course in animal husbandry and best breeding practices as it applies to their chosen species and to pass an examination at the conclusion of the course.
 - b) That upon completion of the course and successful examination results, a unique Breeder Registration Number (BRN) be allocated to each successful candidate after which they can lawfully commence breeding, but only of the species for which they have studied and passed their examinations – and that if a breeding license is desired for a different species the applicant be required to sit for an examination structured to educate the intending breeder on how best to meet the emotional and physical needs which are unique to that particular species.
 - c) That Government registered breeders agree to random inspections of their premises and annual audits of their systems at which time their BRN is either renewed for the following twelve months, or suspended / canceled dependent on results of the inspections and audits.

- d) That the BRN be entered on all pedigrees and/or other documentation which refers to that animal, including vaccination certificates and receipts of sale and that the BRN is entered in Central Animal Records along with the microchip number of each animal.
- e) That the BRN of the breeder of any companion animal, must be entered on vaccination certificates along with the microchip number which is already mandatory in Australia and that the BRN be recorded as a matter of course with Central Animal Records
- e) That it be unlawful for any person or entity, including a pet shop, to purchase a companion animal from any source other than from a Government Registered Breeder.
- f) That the law requires the owner of a domestic companion animal to produce the animal's I.D. which shows its microchip number and BRN when presenting the animal to a vet for the first time, or to a boarding establishment. (precedence set wherein the I.D. of a Thoroughbred race horse must accompany the horse at all times and be presented to an attending veterinarian).
- g) That a fine be imposed for the first breach, a more substantial fine be imposed for a second breach and a third breach to cause the breeder to cease breeding for a specified period of time in relation to the severity of the breach, as well as an even more substantial fine.

Summary

By making it unlawful for any person or any entity to purchase a companion animal from any source other than a government registered breeder with an allocated BRN, and by making it a legal requirement for any veterinary or boarding facility to report an animal brought to it which is not accompanied by its I.D. showing the BRN of the breeder at point of origin, the writer is of the opinion that the existing market for puppy mills and individual 'back yard' breeders would cease to exist, or alternatively puppy farms may choose to do the exams for a BRN and therefore place themselves under the scrutiny of the authoritative bodies.

Goals of this Paper

- (i) To encourage discussion and debate on the principles outlined in this Paper
- (ii) To seek the interest of animal welfare groups in lobbying for tighter Government controls and educational programs to qualify breeders before allowing them to breed domestic companion animals.
- (iii) To help create an atmosphere in which diverse groups with the same goals can come together to discuss workable solutions to the problem of indiscriminate breeding practices of domestic companion animals.
- (iv) To seek government and public funding to lobby for parliamentary change if necessary

To address the problem from the grass roots.

Footnote: The following Contributed by Mrs Adele Lindley,

I also think that all breeders should be able to microchip and be able to input the details onto a central database and be able to keep up to date of where there dogs are as the local councils are incapable of keeping records updated or sending out the necessary paperwork in time causing a back log of unnecessary paperwork.

In the UK I was a qualified microchipper and used to put the puppy details on the system myself and when the puppy was sold I could update the database and hit send and the new details and certificate would be posted direct to the new owner with their own password so they were responsible for updating their own dogs' details. A lot of administration and time would be saved if we did this here.

I also think that the breeders should be responsible for the lifetime of the puppies and be willing to have a hand in the re homing of any dog they have bred.

Adele Lindley

**PADS-Personal Assistance Dog Solutions IAADP Registration Number 8114
International Association of Assistance Dog Partners)**

PAT Dogs (Pets as Therapy, UK)

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