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Farmers urged to review changes to working dog laws

By **KAY HOCKING**

Kelpie breeder and Livestock Working Dog Group representative

TWO key reforms are being negotiated at present which will impact farmers who breed working dogs or those who use them in their livestock business.

The first is a proposed *Code of Practice for the Wellbeing of Dogs and Cats in Breeding Facilities*. Livestock SA through the Australian Yard Dog Association has been negotiating for livestock working dogs to be exempt from the code but this is unlikely.

The second is proposed changes to the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* and Livestock SA has been part of a Livestock Working Dog Group to consider the impacts on working dog breeders and provide feedback.

There are a number of changes in both reforms including:

- **Local government registration**

Registration of dogs with local government is already required under the Act, however under the proposed changes, there will only be two registration categories - standard, for dogs that have been microchipped and desexed, and non-standard. Only standard dogs will be eligible for registration rebates but there are no details yet about how much registration will be.

Livestock SA is recommending that all councils should recognise active livestock working dogs and provide a concessional rebate for registration because working dogs are an essential tool of trade and have been recognised in the past by rural councils for their importance to the livestock industry.

- **Mandatory vaccination**

It is proposed that all dogs must be vaccinated for distemper, hepatitis and parvovirus as per the vaccine manufacturer's recommendation and at cost to the dog's owner. Exemptions can only be provided in writing by a veterinarian.

- **Mandatory microchipping**

Changes to legislation would see compulsory microchipping of all dogs and cats – including working dogs – by three months of age. While microchipping is not popular because of the added cost, Livestock SA is arguing that a more cost-effective method of application be made available, such as through additional trained and accredited people available to insert microchips, and that the date be more flexible because of more difficult access to veterinarians in the country.

- **Breeder registration costs**

Changes to legislation mean all working dog breeders would need to be registered with the Dog & Cat Management Board or an approved organisation. Breeders must include their registration number in advertising, as well as the animal's microchip number.

Livestock SA is recommending that working dog breeders be able to register at no cost, given working dogs are an integral part of the livestock industry.

- **Breeder definition**

The new code is proposing that anyone who breeds dogs or cats and receives "payment, barter or exchange for the animal" is a breeder and must comply. They must also keep records for at least five years. At this stage people who breed dogs and cats and give them away do not have to comply with the code.

Livestock SA believes that all people who breed dogs should comply otherwise there is little accountability to ensure puppies and dogs receive responsible care.

- **Minimum housing standard**

The working dog group is recommending the minimum standard for housing include a shelter with a roof and that its height allow the dog to stand comfortably with free space above. This provides freedom of movement and prevents dogs from climbing out and injuring themselves but still provides for good health and wellbeing.

We strongly urge everyone involved with livestock working dogs to make a submission on the government's Your Say website. Do not just say yes or no, strengthen your argument with reasons supported by viable and factual information.

Submissions on the draft code of practice close tomorrow (Friday, May 29) while submissions on the proposed changes to the Act close on Friday, June 26, 2015.

While it may be confusing which change is being proposed under the code or legislation, Livestock SA has been assured that comments delivered under either submission will be redirected to the right place. The most important thing is that you take the time to have your say and ensure farmers and working dog breeders and not unnecessarily overburdened with regulation.

- **Details:** For more information or to make a submission, visit <http://yoursay.sa.gov.au/> or call Livestock SA on 08 8297 2299.