
Draft Dog and Cat Management (Miscellaneous) Amendment Bill 2015

Results of Public Consultation (YourSAy)

Dogs and cats are important to South Australians.

The Dog and Cat Management Act (the Act) was enacted in 1995. The Government has proposed revising the Act to improve the way dogs and cats are managed in our community. The proposed changes have a focus on mandatory microchipping, breeder registration, penalties and expiation, dog registration and assistance dogs. There are also proposed changes to increase local councils' capacity to manage dogs and cats.

From 19 April – 26 June 2015 we asked for your opinion on the proposed reforms. We received over 1800 submissions from individuals and organisations. Some were received by post or email but the majority of people chose to fill out the online survey. The key results of the responses to the online survey are detailed in this report.

The valuable feedback, along with written submissions and the recommendations of the Citizens' Jury on unwanted dogs and cats, are being considered by the Government prior to finalising the *Dog and Cat Management (Miscellaneous) Amendment Bill 2015* for introduction into Parliament.



1. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS OF SUBMISSIONS DATA

1820 valid responses were received to the online survey on the YourSAY website. The majority of respondents were dog owners (50.39%), females (79.70%), aged between 36 and 45 (21.14%) and found out about the public consultation through Facebook (50.41%).

This report only relates to online submissions through YourSAY.

2. MANDATORY MICROCHIPPING

1,633 people answered the question in relation to introduction of mandatory microchipping.

It is proposed that all dogs and cats are microchipped so that they can be returned if lost. The specific proposals are:

1. All existing and new dogs and cats will need to be microchipped by a prescribed age. It is proposed that this age be three months.
2. Penalties will be imposed for owning a un-microchipped dog or cat and for not keeping your details with a microchip registry current.
3. Regulations will specify who can implant microchips in South Australia (a veterinarian or an appropriately trained person)

Your opinion on the mandatory microchipping proposal:

82.25% supported proposals **1, 2 and 3**.

12.61% support some but not all of the proposals.

5.14% did not support any of the proposals (**1, 2 or 3**).

Your general comments on the mandatory microchipping proposal:

3.85% of you suggested an alternative age (instead of three months) for microchipping of dogs and cats. Some thought 8 weeks would be reasonable so that animals are microchipped before sale, others preferred six months so animals can be microchipped when they are anaesthetised for desexing.

2.6% believed that there should be exemptions to mandatory microchipping. Suggested exemptions included for elderly animals, indoor cats, working dogs, breeders and dogs and cats in regional areas whose owners cannot access a vet.

3.7% of people commented that they are concerned about the cost of microchipping and would like concessions and discounts made available.



3. BREEDER REGISTRATION

1,805 people answered the question about introduction of dog and cat breeder registration.

It is proposed that anyone who breeds dogs and cats for sale will need to register with the Dog and Cat Management Board or through an approved organisation to assist in managing dogs and cats and help consumers to be confident their pet has come from healthy and humane conditions. There may be a fee to register as a breeder. The specific proposals are:

1. Anyone who breeds a dog or cat for sale will be defined as a 'breeder'.
2. A breeder will need to include their breeder registration number in any advertisements that are placed for the sale of a dog or cat, including online sales.
3. Penalties will be imposed for failing to register as a breeder.

Your opinion on the breeder registration proposal:

87.59% supported proposals **1**, **2** and **3**.

7.7% support some but not all of the proposals.

4.71% did not support any of the proposals (**1**, **2** or **3**).

Your general comments on the breeder registration proposal:

0.5% of you stated that you would exempt people who accidentally breed a dog or cat from the requirement to register.

A number of people indicated that they want working dog breeders exempt from the proposal.



4. PENALTIES AND EXPIATIONS

1,790 people provided us with a response to the proposal about increasing penalties and expiations.

It is proposed to increase fines and penalties for dog attack offences, nuisance barking and wandering dogs as well as all other existing offences.

Do you support the increased expiation and penalties?

Your opinion on the increases to expiations and penalties:

56.93% supported the increases to expiations and penalties

18.99% did not support the increases to expiations and penalties

24.08% were unsure about the increases to expiations and penalties

Your general comments on the increases to expiations and penalties:

4.45% commented that if the expiations and penalties were increased, they should be waived for a first offence if the dog was wandering-at-large or barking.

1.7% expressed concern that the wandering-at-large expiation increase was too high (from \$80 currently to \$315 proposed).

Many people indicated that if they were expiated by a council for \$315 for their dog getting out of a gate, they may have difficulty paying and the dog may be left at the pound or shelter.

You also told us that there should be a focus on prevention of dog attacks through education and dog training.



5. DOG REGISTRATION

1,779 people answered the questions we asked about changing dog registration.

It is proposed to simplify the dog registration process by introducing the new category of 'Standard dog'. This is a dog that has been both microchipped and desexed. Dog registration fees for a 'Standard dog' will be much less than for other dogs. The specific proposals are:

1. The registration category of 'Standard Dog' is introduced (a dog that is microchipped and desexed)
2. The registration rebate for a dog that has been trained will be removed

Your opinion on the changes to dog registration:

50.2% supported the dog registration proposal (**1** and **2**).

35.47% supported some but not all of the proposals.

14.33% were unsure, or did not, support the proposal (**1** and **2**).

Your general comments on changing dog registration:

A large number of people did not want the training rebate removed. The training rebate, which saves owners a maximum of \$8.50 per dog, is costly for councils to administer. It is proposed that the training rebate will no longer be mandatory but councils can voluntarily continue to provide it to dog owners if they wish.

8.6% people raised that they support the introduction of mandatory desexing.

6% said that they would like cat registration to be introduced state-wide.

9.7% of respondents wanted wandering-at-large and nuisance provisions in the Dog and Cat Management Act to apply to cats.



6. ASSISTANCE DOGS

1,767 people answered the online question about reforms to how disability dogs are referred to and accredited:

It is proposed to replace the terms 'Disability Dog', 'Guide Dog, and 'Hearing Dog' with the term 'Assistance Dog'. This makes South Australian terminology consistent with the rest of Australia. The specific proposals are:

1. Remove the term 'Disability Dog' and similar terms in favour of the nationally consistent term 'Assistance Dog'.
2. Provide Assistance Dogs in training with public access rights when accompanied by an accredited trainer.
3. Broaden the range of bodies that can accredit Assistance Dogs

Your opinion on the assistance dog reforms:

84.78% supported the assistance dog proposal (**1**, **2** and **3**).

10.24% supported some but not all of the reforms.

4.98% were unsure if they supported the proposals (**1**, **2** and **3**).

Your general comments on assistance dogs:

1.9% of people were concerned that allowing organisations to accredit their own dogs could result in assistance dogs being a lower quality and strict rules should control which organisations accredit.

0.5% of people were worried that removing 'hearing dogs' and 'guide dogs' from the Dog and Cat Management Act and calling them all 'assistance dogs' may reduce recognition of hearing and guide dogs.



What next...?

The results from the online survey show that the proposed reforms are broadly supported. The comments received through the survey are being considered and will inform revisions to the draft Bill, what requirements and controls are placed in the Regulations and how the changes are implemented.

The next step will be for the reforms to be debated in the South Australian Parliament and, if passed, become law. It is likely that this process will commence in early 2016.

Thank you to all those who participated in the consultation period. Your opinions and comments will assist us to get the reforms right and improve dog and cat management for our pets and our communities.

