

Dogs ACT response to the draft Code Of Practice For The Welfare Of Dogs In The ACT

Dogs ACT refers to the Code Of Practice For The Welfare of Dogs in the ACT and thank the ACT Government for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft as part of your community consultation process. Dogs ACT is a key stakeholder in the legislation and regulation of dog ownership in the ACT, and as an organisation it is essential that we advocate strongly for the needs of our members and the best interests of their dogs. Dogs ACT is at the forefront of dog welfare and we hold our members to a very high standard in ensuring the health and welfare of the dogs in their care, which meet and often exceed those standards compelled by the ACT Government's legislation and regulation in this space.

Having reviewed the draft Code, Dogs ACT would like to make the following comments:

- S1.4.1 Under section 74 of the Domestic Animals Act 2000, all dogs older than six months of age must be desexed/sterilised by a registered veterinarian unless the owner/person in charge holds a permit (issued by the Registrar of Domestic Animal Services) to keep a dog that is not desexed/sterilised.
 - This is contrary to contemporary veterinary evidence regarding optimum age of desexing for the health of dogs. For almost all dogs, and especially for large and giant breeds, it is strongly recommended for optimal health and welfare for desexing to be delayed until they have undergone puberty and reached musculoskeletal maturity (i.e. desexing as a young adult). There is ample evidence to indicate that early desexing can increase the risk of various cancers, musculoskeletal conditions and urogenital conditions. Dogs ACT believes that this element of the code only considers contraception and population control without giving due attention to the health and welfare of dogs as individuals.
- S1.4.2 A valid reason to keep a dog undesexed/unsterilised must be given to the Registrar of Domestic Animal Services.



A.C.T. Canine Association Inc.

- In consideration of our response to S1.4.1, Dogs ACT believes that premature desexing is clearly detrimental for the health and welfare of most dogs. This alone is a 'valid reason' and essentially universal for all dogs. Obtaining a letter from a veterinarian to supply to Domestic Animal Services recommending delaying desexing therefore seems to be an unnecessary and unreasonable formality. This is a persistent concern for our members, many of whom have experienced unpleasant communication from Domestic Animal Services strongly compelling them to desex their dog unless they urgently obtain this letter from a veterinarian.
- G1.5.2 Dogs should be trained with the use of positive reinforcement techniques because these are the most effective techniques.
 - This clause fails to consider the full spectrum of operant conditioning theory and appeals to ideologically motivated espousals such as 'force free' and 'positive only' training. These ideas are based in anthropomorphism and a sense of what is 'good' and 'kind', rather than being strictly scientific and evidence based. Many in the dog training community believe that carefully judicious and infrequent use of some aversive techniques by or under the supervision of a skilled dog trainer is appropriate and not deleterious for a dog's health and wellbeing.
 - Dogs ACT believes that people should have the freedom to choose the training techniques that they use with their dog so long as the training does not clearly have a net negative impact on the health, welfare and behaviour of the dog.
- S3.1.1 A person in charge of dogs must ensure the dogs in their care are provided with:
 - human contact for a reasonable length of time each day, 3 hours minimum;
 - This component of the Code, whilst well intentioned, should be articulated more clearly as to what 'human contact' is defined as. Dogs ACT supports this in principle and agrees with the importance of human contact for the human-animal bond and the welfare of dogs more generally. However, it is clear from the public discourse regarding this section of the Code that the public are concerned about feeling compelled to spend a minimum of 3 hours directly engaging with their dog, which is logistically unfeasible for many dog owners.



A.C.T. Canine Association Inc.

- The Domestic Animals Act 2000 specifies that a dog breeders' licence is required.
 - Dogs ACT maintains that licensing for breeders must not be unduly restrictive and ACT Government policy should not discourage the conscientious and ethical breeding of purebred dogs by Dogs ACT registered breeders.
- S7.1.3 All dogs must be secured by installing a harness to restrain the dog. An alternative may be a secured container securely fitted within the vehicle. Dogs must be securely attached to the vehicle in such a way to limit the dogs' movement.
 - Members have expressed that due to personal preferences and conformational differences between breeds, some people choose for their dogs to wear an appropriately fitted flat collar or other form of restraint instead of a body harness for purposes of transport. We are therefore concerned that this element of the Code may compel dog owners to utilise forms of restraint in vehicles that their dogs may not be familiar or comfortable with, or may not be appropriate for their dog's body type, and we would instead prefer to see dog owners maintain freedom of choice in this so long as their method of restraint minimises distraction and ensures the safety of both the driver and the dog.
- S7.2.4 The vehicle or trailer in or on which the cage is being transported should be fitted with appropriate roof ventilation and the cage must be secured safely to the vehicle.
 - This section of the Code leads us to the understanding that transporting a dog in a dog crate/cage in an ordinary passenger vehicle that does not have roof ventilation would be non-compliant. It is common practice and safe for people to transport dogs in crates secured in the back of vans and station wagon cars with normal out of factory heating, cooling and ventilation features.
- S8.4 Puppies must not be rehomed and or permanently removed from their mother earlier than eight (8) weeks of age, unless it is under direction of a registered veterinarian and due to exceptional circumstances.
 - Dogs ACT supports that puppies must stay in the care of the breeder until they are at least 8 weeks of age, however, puppies are often weaned from their dam earlier than 8 weeks of age and this is an appropriate practice for breeders to



A.C.T. Canine Association Inc.

undertake in consideration of the physical health and behavioural needs of both the litter and the dam. This is a conventional, well-established practice amongst dog breeders.

- S8.5 A person must only breed a litter from a dog if the dog is between the ages of 24 months and six (6) years, must not breed a litter more than once in 18 months and must not breed a litter from a dog if the dog has already bred four (4) litters.
 - Dogs ACT believes that the age range of 24 months – 6 years, although a reasonable ‘general rule’, is somewhat arbitrary and the Code fails to consider breed-specific differences in reaching musculoskeletal and reproductive maturity. Dogs ACT refers to Dogs Australia and its state and territory affiliates for examples of more nuanced and considered directions around minimum and maximum ages of breeding bitches.

Dogs ACT would welcome any opportunities to address our comments regarding the draft Code Of Practice For The Welfare of Dogs in the ACT further. Please direct any correspondence via email to admin@dogsact.org.au or via mail to Dogs ACT PO Box 815 Dickson ACT 2602.