

Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016

Foster Carers

What is the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016?

The Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016 (Bill) introduces a range of amendments to the *Domestic Animals Act 1994 (Act)*. These amendments deliver on the Government's election commitment to reform the dog breeding and pet shop industries in Victoria and better regulate the sale of dogs and cats.

Under the amended Act:

- there are limits on the number of fertile female dogs breeders can keep
- pet shops are only able to sell dogs and cats sourced from shelters, pounds or enrolled foster carers
- the role of foster carers is clearer
- there are new definitions for 'recreational breeders' and 'microbreeders'
- the definition of 'farm working dogs' is clarified
- the animal sale permit system is simplified
- traceability of cats and dogs is improved through the establishment of the Pet Exchange Register
- offences apply for publishing non-compliant pet sale advertisements.

Key changes:

- **Voluntarily enrolled foster carers will get reduced registration fees for dogs and cats in their temporary care.**
- Voluntarily enrolled foster carers will be able to supply pet shops with kittens from eight weeks of age (and puppies from six months of age), should they choose.
- The Bill has been amended following a Parliamentary Inquiry and additional consultation with foster care groups and other stakeholders.
- Under the changes, Victorian pet owners will be able to clearly tell where their pet has come from.

I am a foster carer. What does this Bill mean for me?

This Bill recognises the integral role foster carers, community foster care networks, and rescue organisations play in the management of lost, stray and abandoned dogs and cats in the Victorian community.

The Bill creates a voluntary enrolment scheme for individual foster carers. Foster carers who choose to enrol in the scheme with their local council will receive:

- a reduced registration rate of \$7 for each dog they foster during the first 12 months the dog is in their care
- a reduced registration rate of \$4 for each cat they foster during the first 12 months the cat is in their care
- the ability to use pet shops as a means of providing additional community exposure to dogs six months of age or older, and cats eight weeks of age or older.

For members of community foster care networks, the Bill does not require you to change the way you work or interact with your network.

How will voluntarily enrolling as a foster carer reduce the costs of fostering?

Under current Victorian law, foster carers are required to register all animals (over three months of age) housed at their premises with the local council; even if the animal is only with them temporarily.

The cost of registering a dog or cat can be more than \$100 if a dog or cat is entire. The government recognises the vital role that foster carers play in the community and wants to support foster carers by reducing this cost of registration.

I am a foster carer and I don't currently register the dogs and cats I foster care. What advice do you have?

If you need information about what your legal responsibilities are, you should download a copy of the Guide for Victorian Community Foster Care Networks and Rescue groups from the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources website:

http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/313912/Domestic_animal_guidelines.pdf

I am a member of a Community Foster Care Network (CFCN). Do I enrol with the council as a foster carer or is this done by the CFCN?

Registration as a foster carer is not compulsory.

CFCNs do not register as organisations with the local council. Nor is a CFCN able to register a person as a foster carer on their behalf, or provide a 'blanket' registration for members of the network. CFCNs often have members that reside in different municipalities across Victoria.

If they choose to, individual foster carers can voluntarily enrol with the local council in which they reside and receive the reduced registration rate for cats and dogs in their care.

I am a member of a rescue group. Do I enrol with the council as a foster carer or does my rescue group do this?

Registration as a foster carer is not compulsory.

Rescue groups do not register as organisations with the local council. Nor is a rescue group able to register a person as a foster carer on their behalf, or provide a 'blanket' registration for members of the group. Rescue groups often have members that reside in different municipalities across Victoria.

If they choose to, individual foster carers can voluntarily enrol with the local council in which they reside and receive the reduced registration rate for cats and dogs in their care.

Does the Bill change the status of CFCNs?

No. The Bill does not change the status of CFCNs. CFCNs will not be able to supply animals through a pet shop, unless the organisation's responsible officer is personally enrolled as a foster carer with their local council.

However, CFCNs can apply for an animal sale permit and run adoption days. Adoption days will need to be held at an appropriate venue.

CFCNs sometimes hold adoption days at pet shops. Will CFCNs be able to sell their rescued animals through a pet shop?

A CFCN may apply for an animal sale permit to hold an adoption day at any venue, including pet shops even if the pet shop is registered as a pet shop domestic animal business with council.

Do all foster carers within a CFCN need to be registered? Will it change what a CFCN can do?

No. Each individual foster carer can choose to enrol with their local council. This will not affect any CFCN status or ability to apply for an animal sales permit. Nor does it change the ownership of the animal.

What is the process for a CFCN to obtain an animal sale permit?

A CFCN that intends to hold an animal sale or adoption day will need to apply for a permit from the Minister for Agriculture.

The application must include a copy of an agreement entered into between a veterinary practitioner and the applicant confirming that the veterinary practitioner will attend the sale, if required.

The Minister may issue a permit authorising the applicant to sell animals, specifying the type of animals, the location and time of the sale.

Prior to the event, the Minister must give a copy of the permit, including any conditions imposed on the permit, to the local council.

For a template animal sale permit application, and further details on the

application process, call 136 186 or email pet.welfare@ecodev.vic.gov.au.

Will I have to pay a fee to enrol as a foster carer with my local council?

The Bill creates the power for councils to set an administrative fee for enrolling foster carers. Each council will need to determine whether they will utilise this power to set a fee.

I am a foster carer. Do I need to enrol on the Pet Exchange Register?

All people and organisations advertising a dog or cat for sale or free to a good home will need to have a source number from the Pet Exchange Register (the Register).

CFCNs and foster carers that are not registered with council will be required to self-enrol on the Register to receive a source number for advertisements. Foster carers that are voluntarily enrolled with council will not need to self-enrol as they will be enrolled on the Register by council.

As CFCNs are responsible for advertising cats and dogs for sale or to give away, the CFCN's responsible officer must enrol on the Register to receive a source number. While an advertisement is live a CFCN member will continue to care for the cat or dog.

Will council be able to access my premises if I voluntarily enrol as a foster carer?

Yes. Local council will have the power to inspect your premises if you voluntarily enrol as a foster carer. But they will not be able to enter your home without your express permission or a warrant signed by a magistrate.

The Bill also allows council to set conditions on enrolment of a foster carer. Local council may decide to include conditions relating to inspections of your premises.

Can the local council ask me for my records as a voluntarily enrolled foster carer?

Yes. The Bill requires voluntarily enrolled foster carers to keep records about where their foster animals came from and who they are moved on to.

In addition, voluntarily enrolled foster carers will have to make sure all their foster animals are desexed, microchipped, and vaccinated before they are rehomed to their permanent home.

Your local council may wish to inspect these records from time-to-time.

If I voluntarily enrol as a foster carer with my local council, do I still need an 'excess animal permit'?

Maybe. Local councils place limits on the number of dogs or cats a resident can have. This is part of the local planning scheme and differs between councils and between property types (e.g. residential zone vs farming zone).

Even if you are voluntarily enrolled as a foster carer with your local council, you may still need an 'excess animal permit' if the number of dogs or cats on your property (whether permanently or temporarily) exceeds the allowable limit.

You should contact your local council's planning department for more information about the number of animals you are allowed to keep under your local planning scheme.

Can local council refuse my application to voluntarily enrol as a foster carer?

Yes. Local council have the right to refuse your application to be a voluntarily enrolled foster carer.

Will the number of animals I can foster be limited under the scheme?

The Bill introduces a limit on the number of animals a person can provide foster care to at any given time. But the scheme does not limit the total number of animals you can foster within a given year.

Under the provisions of the Bill any foster carer must not care for more than five adult equivalent dogs or cats or combination of dogs and cats (in addition to their own pets) at any given time.

Should a foster carer wish to care for more than five foster animals, they will need to register their premises as a domestic animal shelter and comply with the mandatory *Code of Practice for the Operation of Shelters and Pounds*.

What is an adult equivalent?

An adult equivalent is:

- a dog or cat 16 weeks or older, or
- a litter of puppies/kittens between 8 and 16 weeks of age, or
- a mother and her litter up to the age of 8 weeks.

Why is foster care being limited to five animals?

It has been difficult for enforcement agencies to determine at what point a foster carer with a large number of animals needs to become a registered animal shelter.

During the development of the *Code of Practice for the Operation of Breeding and Rearing Businesses 2014* several breeding and veterinary experts were consulted to determine what number of breeding animals could be properly cared for in a household situation without the need for purpose built kennels or catteries. These experts recommended five adult animals as the limit. This limit was adopted in the code of practice.

A similar principle applies to foster carers. While foster care animals are not being bred with, they often require intensive behavioural or medical care and rehabilitation.

In addition, many foster carers have their own pets that live within their household. To ensure a foster carer's home is not overwhelmed with high-care animals, and that all the animals in foster care are given sufficient space and care, the Bill will limit foster carers to five adult equivalent animals at any given time. This does not include permanent pets owned by the foster carer, that are fully registered with council.

I have more than five adult equivalent foster animals in my care. What should I do?

You have two options. The first is to try and find another foster carer/s to take on some of your foster animals.

The second option is to register your premises as a shelter with your local council.

I am a rescuer. I often take in large numbers of dogs that I shelter until I can find foster carers to help rehabilitate them. Do I need to register as a shelter?

Technically, if you have more than five adult equivalent animals in your care at any given time, you must register your premises as a shelter with your local council.

However, if you use your premises as a transit premises where the animals are delivered for the foster carers' collection within 24-48 hours, and you do not house more than five foster animals for more than 24-48 hours, you may not need to register as a shelter.

You should speak to your local council about how your rescue organisation works and determine the best option for you.

I am a foster carer and I do not want to enrol with my local council. Am I still limited to five adult animals in my care?

Yes. The new definition limits anyone providing foster care, not just those who voluntarily enrol with their local council.

Does registration as a shelter have tax implications?

Domestic animal business registration is not a business registration related to the Australian taxation system.

The term 'domestic animal business' is a unique name used by the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* to describe an activity. For all intents and purposes, a domestic animal business registration is like a licensing system.

What is involved in registering as a shelter with the local council?

All shelters must be registered annually with their local council and comply with the mandatory *Code of Practice for the Operation of Shelters and Pounds*. A fee will apply for registration. The fee is set individually by each local council.

Local councils will require an inspection of your premises prior to registration each year. You can contact the animal management / local laws section of your council for further details.

More information about the responsibilities of domestic animal businesses, as defined under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, is available at:

<http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/pets/domestic-animal-businesses/shelters-and-pounds>

When will I need to register my premises as a shelter if I have more than five foster care animals?

The commencement date for this legislation is 10 April 2018. So by 11 April 2018 you will need to have registered your premises with your local council.

How long does my registration last?

A shelter registration lasts for a single year from 11 April to 10 April.

You cannot register your premises for more than a year at a time, but you can register your premises part way through a year.

Can local council refuse my application as a shelter?

The *Domestic Animals Act 1994* provides that council "may" register a premise as a shelter. If you have appropriate planning approval and if you are compliant with the *Code of Practice for the Operation Shelters and Pounds* it is unlikely that your council will refuse your application to be registered as a domestic animal business.

However, if your application was refused, under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* you have the right to seek review of that decision in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

I am a foster carer who occasionally breeds from my pet dog. How does the proposed legislation affect me?

If you have one or two fertile females as pets, then there is no issue if you occasionally breed from them, as long as you enrol on the Pet Exchange Register when advertising any puppies or kittens for sale or give away. You can still voluntarily enrol as a foster carer with your council, and the animals will not count towards your five animal limit.

If you have 3 or more fertile females as pets however, your occasional breeding will require you to register as a breeding domestic animal business or recreational breeder in those years. This would prevent you from registering as a shelter as well as voluntarily enrolling with your local council as a foster carer.

Being a breeding domestic animal business or a recreational breeder will still enable you to continue to foster up to five adult equivalent animals at any given time, over and above your own pets. You may not be able to access the reduced registration rate for any animals you foster.

These restrictions are designed to close the supply chain for illegal breeders; that is, they prevent an unscrupulous breeder from registering a breeding business on one premises, opening a shelter on another and distributing their puppies/kittens through the shelter into a pet shop, either owned by them or someone else.

For more information

Contact your local council, visit www.vic.gov.au/pets or call 136 186.

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