

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

Background

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 will be improved through the establishment of the Pet Exchange Register
- offences apply for publishing non-compliant pet sale advertisements.

Key changes:

- The Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016 has been amended following a Parliamentary Inquiry and further consultation with stakeholders.
- The amended Bill makes compliance clearer for responsible pet owners, and for those who breed and sell pets responsibly.
- Under the changes, Victorian pet owners will be able to tell if their pet has come from a responsible source.

Breeding industry reforms

Currently in Victoria, dog breeding businesses range in size from 3 to around 150 fertile female dogs. The Victorian community has expressed concerns for the welfare of dogs in large-scale commercial breeding establishments. Changes introduced through the Bill will limit dog breeding businesses registered with councils to a maximum of 10 fertile female dogs, from 10 April 2020. Commercial breeders approved by the Minister for Agriculture (Minister) may only have a maximum of 50 fertile female dogs.

Owners with one or two fertile female cats or dogs will be defined as ‘microbreeders’. As with current practice, microbreeders will not have to register as a breeder with their local council.

Breeders with 3-10 fertile female dogs or 3 or more fertile female cats (and who are not members of an Applicable Organisation) will be required to register with their local council as a Domestic Animal Business (DAB) and comply with the mandatory Code of Practice for the Operation of Breeding and Rearing Businesses 2014 (updated 2015) (the Code).

Breeders with 11 – 50 fertile female dogs will be defined as a ‘Commercial Dog Breeder’. They must register as a DAB and apply to the Minister for a Commercial Dog Breeder approval. These businesses will be subject to additional audits and inspections of premises as recommended by Victoria’s Chief Veterinary Officer. They must first register as a DAB with their local council, and comply with the Code.

Businesses with more than 50 fertile female dogs will not be allowed to operate after 2020.

Applicable Organisation members and recreational breeders

Members of Applicable Organisations with up to 10 fertile female dogs or cats will not need to register with their local council as a DAB or comply with the Code. Instead, they will come under the new definition of a ‘recreational breeder’.

Recreational breeders must comply with their organisation’s rules and codes.

Recreational breeders will be recorded on the Pet Exchange Register (the Register), and will be issued with a source number that must be included in all pet sale advertisements.

The Pet Exchange Register

The Bill will establish a new register, to be known as the Pet Exchange Register (the Register). All DABs, microbreeders, recreational breeders and members of the public who are selling or giving away cats or dogs will be required to enrol.

Once enrolled, a unique source number will be generated. The source number will enhance traceability of cats and dogs.

The Act regulates DABs by ensuring they register premises with local councils. All 79 councils in Victoria currently keep individual registers of DABs. Councils will be responsible for uploading and updating the details of DABs, with others required to self-enrol on the Register.

The Register will also make it easier for councils to determine if they should approve or renew a DAB application, or whether it will breach restrictions on co-registration.

Only authorised personnel will be able to access full details on the Register. This will include specific officers authorised under the Act who require information in the Register so they can investigate breeding businesses that may be operating unlawfully.

Members of the public will be able to access limited information on the Register, regarding advertisers of cats and dogs. This will enable prospective purchasers to determine if a seller is a legitimate supplier.

The Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources will develop and maintain the Register.

[Pet shop industry reforms](#)

The Bill creates an offence for a breeder to sell cats or dogs to or through a pet shop. Pet shops will only be able to sell dogs over six months of age and cats over eight weeks of age, which have been sourced from a registered pound, animal shelter or enrolled foster carer.

Pet Shops have until the end of June 2018 to adjust to the new requirements, with offences commencing on 1 July 2018.

These provisions will promote the rehoming of animals through pet shops. Buyers often find it easier to get to pet shops than to pounds and shelters. This measure will increase the prospects of rehoming pets.

Pet shops will no longer be an outlet for illegal dog or cat breeders. Registered breeders will only be able to sell directly to the public, rather than through a pet shop.

[Online pet sales](#)

From 1 July 2019, it will be an offence to advertise a dog or cat for sale unless the advert includes the animal's microchip number and the unique source number generated by the Register.

Offences apply to both the person selling the pet, along with the publisher that publishes a non-compliant advertisement. These offences will make it harder for illegal breeders to sell their animals through online sales.

During 2018 and 2019, the government will undertake an education campaign to help consumers identify legally registered breeders. Consumers will be encouraged to check the validity of a breeder or individual's source number before they buy a puppy or kitten.

[Puppy and kitten brokers](#)

Brokers buy puppies and kittens from breeders in Victoria or interstate or act as a breeder's agent. They then sell the breeders' puppies and kittens into the community.

The Bill has included 'rearing' in the definition of a DAB, to clarify that anyone holding a puppy or kitten for sale, including brokers, will have to register with their local council and comply with the Act and the Code.

Ban on co-registration of businesses

The Bill prohibits the co-registration of breeding, shelter, pound and pet shop DAB on a single rateable property or by the same person in Victoria.

This prevents illegal breeders establishing a supply chain to funnel puppies and kittens into a pet shop. It stops an illegal breeder setting up a breeding establishment in one municipality, an illegitimate shelter in a second, and a pet shop (to on-sell animals from the shelter) in a third.

Foster care

The Bill defines foster care as the short-term care of stray, abandoned or unwanted dogs or cats on one premises (including premises involved in a community foster care network), for the purpose of finding them new homes.

The Bill introduces a voluntary initiative where foster carers may enrol with their local council under the foster carer scheme. Those individuals that choose to enrol will be entitled to a reduced registration rate for the animals in their care, along with access to pet shops to rehome their dogs over six months of age, and cats over eight weeks of age.

The reduced rate for animals in foster care will save foster carers money for the first 12 months that the animal is in their care. In return, voluntarily enrolled foster carers will be required to meet minimum vaccination, worming, desexing and record-keeping requirements.

These changes will be made by introducing new regulations under the Bill. Once voluntarily enrolled, foster carers will automatically be registered on the Register and be allocated a source number.

Individual foster carers not enrolled with council must also self-enrol on the Register.

In addition, under the animal sale permit scheme, foster carers will be able to run pet adoption days.

The Bill limits foster care to a maximum of five dogs or cats (with a litter under 16 weeks of age counting as a single animal) per premises. This does not include permanent pets owned by the foster carer that are registered with council.

This limit prevents welfare problems associated with caring for large numbers of animals without appropriate facilities, staff and procedures. It also limits risks to the community of inappropriately or insufficiently rehabilitated animals are rehomed.

If a foster carer wishes to care for more than five dogs or cats or a combination of more than five dogs and cats at any one time, they will be required to register their premises as a DAB (animal shelter). This requirement recognises that, for animal welfare reasons, larger numbers of dogs and cats in a household environment require additional facilities and care.

Community Foster Care Networks

The Bill does not change the status of Community Foster Care Networks (CFCNs). Unlike voluntarily enrolled foster carers, CFCNs will not be able to supply animals through a pet shop, unless they are also registered with council as an animal shelter or foster carer.

However, CFCNs can apply for an animal sale permit and run adoption days. Adoption days will need to be held at appropriate venue, which may include, for example, a pet shop.

CFCNs will need to self-enrol on the Register. Minimal information is required for CFCNs to enrol on the Register.

Farm working dogs

Primary producers will be entitled to register their dogs with local council as 'farm working dogs', and will be eligible for a reduced registration fee. A dog registered with council as a farm working dog will not count towards a property's fertile female limit for breeding purposes.

Other amendments

The Bill introduces a number of other amendments, such as:

- increases to the payments for domestic animal business registrations from \$10 to \$20 made by Councils to the Treasurer
- introducing an animal sale permit approved by the Minister to allow sales where animal welfare and consumer protections are in place (such as pet adoption days)
- creating a scheme for the Minister to declare bird organisations and to allow Victorian bird clubs to conduct bird sales after notifying the departmental Secretary.

Timeframes

Existing dog breeding businesses will have until 10 April 2020 to reduce their fertile female dog numbers to 50 or less by not replacing retiring dogs.

Pet shops will have until 1 July 2018 to change their business models to only accept animals from approved sources.

The Pet Exchange Register, and associated advertising requirements will become mandatory from 1 July 2019.

All other amendments to the Act contained in the Bill will commence 10 April 2018.

For more information

Visit www.vic.gov.au/pets or call 136 186.

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