

DOCKING OF DOGS' TAILS

304. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development:

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In view of -

Hon Tom Stephens: Thank you for that statue. It went down well, and the lizard enjoyed travelling with it.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The minister might want to listen to the next question.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: We can do the official presentation later.

Hon Tom Stephens: What a pity you never provided me with the same courtesy.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: This has nothing to do with statues. In view of the minister's recent comments concerning his abhorrence of the practice of docking dogs' tails, does he acknowledge that -

- (a) this practice has for ages been successfully used on old English sheepdogs with no ill effects;
- (b) there is no reason for a blanket ban to apply to breeds for which docking can continue as an approved veterinary procedure or subject to a code of practice; and
- (c) as the Government controls the Legislative Council agenda, it should attach a higher priority to debating the Animal Welfare Bill in this Chamber so that these issues can be resolved?

Hon TOM STEPHENS replied:

The existing legislation governing the protection of animals provides for a head of power to create regulations regarding the mutilation of animals. My proposal is to enact regulations some time next year to deal with the issue of tail docking in Western Australia. That head of power exists. The only difference that would apply if the Animal Welfare Bill were enacted would be the penalties. The Bill before the House, which will hopefully be debated at an early point, proposes to change the penalties. The issue of the mutilation of animals has been considered by all jurisdictions of the Commonwealth - the States and Territories. There is movement in this area. The Australian Capital Territory has already moved to ban tail docking. The other jurisdictions of the Commonwealth have agreed to move in that direction, although exceptions will be allowed. There will be no opportunity for tail docking for cosmetic purposes, which is as it should be. It appears that no-one in this area is an advocate of the docking of tails for purely cosmetic purposes. The Canine Association of Western Australia very kindly made its code of conduct available to me. It prescribes that anyone who is a member of the Canine Association - breeders and the like - should not conduct tail docking for cosmetic purposes. The association allows tail docking for only therapeutic or prophylactic purposes. My proposal is that tail docking be allowed for only therapeutic or prophylactic purposes. To that extent, the ban will reinforce the position of the Canine Association. The decision about what would constitute a prophylactic or therapeutic purpose would be left to the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Western Australia. Decisions about which medical procedures involving humans are permitted are determined by those most familiar with the biology of the human - I presume that body would be the Medical Board of Western Australia. Decisions involving questions of human biology are left to the specialists; therefore, it is my intention to leave decisions involving questions of the biology of dogs in the hands of the Veterinary Surgeons Board. It will determine what constitutes therapeutic or prophylactic purposes.

I had some useful discussions with the Canine Association last Friday, and on Friday and Sunday I had conversations with a large number of people with an interest in animal welfare, including people from the companion animals association, people from a variety of interest groups with a particular focus on dogs and breeders. I found that very useful, and as a result I want to have more discussion with the Australian Veterinarians Association about its interpretation of prophylactic and therapeutic. I would like to understand more about the views of the Veterinary Surgeons Board and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. There is a balance in these things, and if there is a role for tail-docking that is legitimately therapeutic or prophylactic, there should be no problem, because I am not bringing about any change apart from placing the decision making in the hands of the Veterinary Surgeons Board itself. That is a source of controversy amongst the breeders and the Canine Association, which advocates leaving things as they are.

The PRESIDENT: I trust the minister is bringing his answer to a conclusion.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: It is a very interesting topic, and I hope the honourable member has learnt a bit from my reply. I found the discussion on the weekend very interesting, and I appreciate the frankness and forthrightness of the people who came forward with their views.