

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Sixtieth Report — Petition No. 020 — Dog Act 1976 — Tabling

HON PETER FOSTER (Mining and Pastoral) [10.02 am]: I am directed to present the sixtieth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs titled *Petition No. 020 — Dog Act 1976*.

[See paper [1886](#).]

Hon PETER FOSTER: The report that I have just tabled advises the house of the committee's investigations into petition 20, tabled in this house by Hon Tjorn Sibma, MLC, on 5 August 2021. It contained 107 signatures. The petitioners requested the Legislative Council to investigate the introduction of stronger penalties for dog attacks, the removal and destruction of offending dogs and a compulsory education program for owners of dogs that have previously attacked people or other animals.

As part of its preliminary inquiries, the committee sought submissions from the principal petitioner and the tabling member, as is its normal procedure, and also wrote to the Minister for Local Government, the RSPCA, the Western Australian Local Government Association and a number of local governments in the state. Subsequently, on 27 April 2022, the committee held hearings with the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries and four selected local governments, being the Cities of Albany, Swan and Mandurah, and the Shire of Broome. This is not the report of a formal inquiry. On the basis of the evidence received, the committee felt that such an inquiry was not necessary. It did, however, think that the matters raised warranted a report to this house.

Local governments are responsible for administering and enforcing the Dog Act 1976, and can impose a modified penalty of up to \$400 for dog attacks. However, should an offending dog owner be successfully prosecuted, the act currently provides for a penalty of \$10 000 for an attack that causes injury, and a maximum fine of \$20 000 if the attacking dog is a declared dangerous dog. The act also provides a maximum prison sentence of 10 years if a dangerous dog kills or threatens the life of a person. The committee took the view, on the basis of the evidence received, that the penalties available to the courts are already significant, and that increasing them would be unlikely to act as a further deterrent. Instead, it was felt that responsible dog ownership is more likely to be achieved through education and public awareness campaigns than through any increased fines. Local governments are encouraged to find ways to encourage participation in such campaigns or in dog-training courses.

The committee took note of the fact that under new regulations being formulated following amendments to the act to be made by the Dog Amendment (Stop Puppy Farming) Act 2021, a new, centralised dog-registration system will be created. This should allow for the uniform storage of information on dog attacks across the state, which it is hoped will assist local governments in their administration of the act. An issue of concern to the committee was the statutory requirements for dangerous dog enclosures. When compared to those in other states, the requirements in Western Australia are not sufficiently detailed or robust, in the committee's view, and could be strengthened. In the meantime, some uniform guidelines for local governments for what may be regarded as minimum requirements for dangerous dog enclosures could be produced.

The committee takes this opportunity to thank the petitioners for bringing these issues to the attention of the house, and also those people and organisations that provided evidence. I commend the report to the house.