

Mr MALEY (Agriculture and Fisheries): Madam Speaker, I thank the members who made a contribution to this critical Bill. I also thank the Member for Goyder. I know he is passionate about animals because I have been to his house; it is like going to a local zoo.

I thank the scrutiny committee for its careful consideration of the report, and I thank the Chair and members for doing what they did, as well as the members of the public who took time out to make contributions. Thank you for the work you did, not only looking after the Bill but preparing the report and outlining the matters raised about the legislative amendments.

The aim of this Bill is to ensure the Northern Territory has some of the strongest animal protection laws in Australia, and the government is committing to ensure that the NT's animal protection laws meet the evolving expectation of the community. Animals deserve to be safe; they are our furry friends. These new laws will strengthen animal welfare safeguards and enforce the toughest penalties for animal cruelty offences and sexual involvement with animals offences.

The amendments to the cruelty offences in the Criminal Code represent the doubling—and, in some cases, tripling—of the penalty maximums or imprisonment if Mr Britton was to commit these shocking crimes today. The Legislative Scrutiny Committee only made one recommendation for the Bill, and I understand as part of its consideration the committee invited submissions from dedicated animal welfare groups and members of the public. I thank again those people who took time to provide feedback.

Of the only recommendation, it is not proposed to adopt that recommendation, as it is an exempted use of electric shock prodders on livestock animals, including crocodiles—is adequate in providing that protection in another section, so we think it is already covered.

Amendments to the *Animal Protection Act 2018*, the Animal Protection Regulations 2022 and the Criminal Code aim to provide greater protections and enforcements for all animals in the Northern Territory, including support industry that is important to the Northern Territory economy.

As honourable members are aware, the legislative reforms in this Bill have been informed through direct engagement and consultation across a broad range of stakeholders and the community, including a public Have Your Say campaign. The main amendments in this Bill talk about existing duty of care offences under section 23 of the Act, and the maximum penalties increasing from 100 penalty units, or one year imprisonment, to 200 penalty units or two years' imprisonment.

Inserting new strict liability specific minimum level of care offences categories, these new lower-level offences are aimed to provide greater compliance and enforcement flexibility to our frontline officers, including the ability to issue infringement notices. In relation to the serious animal cruelty offences in section 24 of the Act, the maximum penalties increase from 200 penalty units, or two years' imprisonment, to 300 penalty units and three years' imprisonment.

A new offence is being inserted relating to the possession and use of prong collars on dogs. Section 34 of the Act is also repealed and replaced to provide clarity as to the need to restrain a dog when travelling in the back of a ute or trailer.

The main amendments contained in it also clarify and provide new authorised officer entry and inspection powers, including:

- the ability to seek additional information to better identify a person as part of an investigation or for issuing enforcement notices
- to clarify the ability of an authorised officer to enter a locked vehicle or premises in an emergency to rescue animals in distress
- to provide new authorised officers entry and inspection powers where a place has been used for a commercial purpose, such as boarding kennels and doggy daycare centres, and where premises are being used to train and race animals
- the ability for an authorised officer to collect samples, such as blood, from animals connected to an offence.

The regulations are being amended to provide for more clarification regarding the use of electrical devices on animals. This will provide more guidance and certainty to the industry and the community while ensuring that animals are better protected.

Additionally, the regulations will insert new animal welfare codes of practice and guidelines for regulating camp drafts, rodeos, boarding kennels and racing greyhounds and horses.

The Bill also amends the Criminal Code to introduce a new serious offence to the Criminal Code to cover the production and distribution and possession of animal crush material and material related to sexual involvement with an animal with a maximum penalty of five years or 5,000 penalty units if it is a corporation. It also amends the Criminal Code to increase the maximum of penalty of the offence, sexual involvement with an animal, from seven years to 10 years.

These amendments respond to the reprehensible cruelty offences committed by Mr Britton and aim to provide better protections and enforcement for all animal in the Northern Territory. The amendments in the Bill also align with other states and territories to ensure that the Territory has some of the toughest animal protection laws in Australia.

These laws will strengthen animal protection safeguards, enforce the toughest ever penalties for animal cruelty offences and 'sexual involvement with an animal' offences. Territorians have seen shocking cases of animal cruelty in recent years and the community is telling us that they are sick of offenders who are appearing to walk away with a slap on the wrist.

Once these new laws are passed, those who commit the same kind of shocking animal cruelty and animal sex offending like those done by Mr Britton may be looking at a very long time in jail.

I thank everyone for their involvement in the development of this Bill. I thank the Biosecurity and Animal Welfare Branch within the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries; the offices attached to the Attorney-General; of course, my own staff; and all the people involved in making submissions.

This critical legislation does not happen without the expertise and hard work of departmental experts and professionals. I thank all the stakeholders and community members and organisations who made contributions and submissions in relation to this, and my Animal Welfare Advisory Committee.

I give particular thanks to Anitra and Dean Jackson who are here today from Evie's Bark, who gave meaningful negotiations for the past 16 months or so. I hope the new animal protections law serves you and your community well.

Finally, I thank the Parliamentary Counsel for the dedication in making sure that this Bill is legally sound and represents our intentions.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.