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Committee Secretary
Legislative Scrutiny Committee
Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory
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Submission in Strong Support of the Animal Protection and Related Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Executive Summary

I write in strong support of the Animal Protection and Related Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (“the Bill”). This reform represents a significant step toward modernising the Northern Territory’s animal welfare framework, aligning it with national and international best practice. The Bill introduces enforceable care standards, stronger deterrents against cruelty, and modern codes of practice.

While I commend its overall direction, I urge the Committee to strengthen sentencing provisions, increase penalties for certain offences, remove outdated cultural exemptions, and address important omissions such as recognition of animal sentience and regulation of large-scale breeding (“puppy farms”).

1. Support for Strengthened Animal Welfare Standards

The proposed amendments to the *Animal Protection Act 2018* are essential for modernising and strengthening animal welfare in the Northern Territory. I commend the Bill’s clear, enforceable requirements for:

- **Provision of water, shelter, and hygienic environments (Sections 23A & 23B)** – essential, non-negotiable aspects of responsible care.
- **Mandatory treatment for disease, injury or suffering (Section 23C)** – closes a gap in ensuring timely veterinary intervention.
- **Prohibition of abandonment (Section 23E)** – reinforces the legal and moral duty of care owed to animals.

2. Stronger Deterrence Against Cruelty

The Bill’s increased penalties for cruelty (up to three years’ imprisonment) send a clear message that such behaviour is unacceptable and will be treated seriously, reflecting contemporary community values.

3. Ban on Prong Collars and Regulation of Electrical Devices

The prohibition of prong collars (Section 31A) and the regulation of electrical devices (Regulations 5–9) are welcome and consistent with modern, evidence-based training practices.

Research consistently shows that aversive tools can cause physical injury, psychological distress, and may exacerbate behavioural issues, particularly when underlying causes—such as chronic pain—are unaddressed. Evidence-backed humane, reward-based (with healthy boundaries applied) training methods are effective, safe, and should be the standard.

4. Improved Enforcement Powers

The enhanced inspection and enforcement provisions (Sections 81, 83, and 88) will allow authorised officers to respond more effectively to cruelty and neglect. I recommend reducing the current minimum 24-hour notice period for commercial premises to same-day notice to prevent concealment of evidence.

5. Addressing Emerging Offences

The introduction of offences relating to animal sexual abuse and crush material (Section 125DA) is a vital step in tackling emerging forms of harm. However, the proposed maximum sentence is too low and does not meet community expectations, particularly in light of high-profile cases such as Adam Britton's.

6. Integration of Modern Codes of Practice

The adoption of contemporary national industry codes of practice (Regulation 4 & Schedule 1 Part B) will bring NT standards into line with the rest of Australia, particularly in relation to boarding facilities, racing animals, exhibited animals, and animal shelters.

7. Infringement Notices

The introduction of infringement notices will give officers a faster, more practical enforcement tool, reducing reliance on costly and time-consuming prosecutions.

Disappointments & Recommendations

a) Sentencing for Serious Offences

- Increase the maximum sentence for Aggravated Cruelty (Section 25) and for new Section 125DA offences from three years to **10 years** to reflect community expectations and allow proportionate sentencing in severe cases.

b) Penalties for Prohibited Devices

- Increase infringement penalties for possession and use of prong collars to **3 penalty units for possession** and **6 penalty units for use**, with no exemptions for individuals or commercial businesses.

c) Recognition of Animal Sentience

- Amend the Act to recognise animals as sentient beings, not mere property—reflecting modern scientific understanding and societal values.

d) Removal of Cultural Exemptions

- Repeal exemptions for Aboriginal persons under Sections 24 and 25 so that cruelty laws apply equally to all, without cultural or racial exemptions.

e) Regulation of Large-Scale Breeding

- Introduce specific regulations to address “puppy factories,” including limits on the number of litters per breeding bitch and minimum care standards.

f) Inspection Notice Period

- Reduce minimum notice for commercial premises inspections to same-day notice to ensure effective enforcement.

Conclusion


The *Animal Protection and Related Legislation Amendment Bill 2025* is a progressive reform package that will significantly improve animal welfare in the Northern Territory.

I urge the Committee to recommend its passage without delay and to incorporate the above recommendations to ensure the Territory’s animal welfare laws are modern, enforceable, and reflective of community values.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours sincerely,

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