

# TRANSCRIPT

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

### Inquiry into the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016

Melbourne — 9 November 2016

#### Members

Mr Joshua Morris — Chair

Mr Khalil Eideh — Deputy Chair

Mr Jeff Bourman

Mr Nazih Elasmr

Mr Bernie Finn

Ms Colleen Hartland

Mr Shaun Leane

Mr Craig Ondarchie

#### Participating member

Ms Samantha Dunn

#### Staff

Secretary: Ms Lilian Topic

#### Witnesses

Mr Greg Kirby, proprietor,

Ms Mary Kirby, proprietor, Upmarket Pets; and

Dr Rohan Hart, consulting veterinarian.

**The CHAIR** — I reopen the Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure public hearing. Thank you to our witnesses who are present here this evening. Today the committee is hearing evidence in relation to its inquiry into the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016. The evidence is being recorded. All evidence taken this evening is protected by parliamentary privilege, therefore you are protected for what you say in here today, but if you go outside and repeat those same things, those comments may not be protected by the same privilege.

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to provide evidence to the committee. You may like make to make some introductory comments, then we will have questions from the committee to follow.

**Ms KIRBY** — Mr Chairman and members of the committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before this hearing to express our grave concerns in relation to the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farm and Pet Shops) Bill 2016.

Greg and I run a family business. We own and operate three pet shops and aquariums in the Melbourne metropolitan area, one of which, Upmarket Pets, opposite the Queen Victoria Market, sells a wide range of quality puppies and kittens. We sell approximately 550 puppies and 110 kittens per year. We employ around 50 people across all of our businesses, 18 of whom are at Upmarket Pets. All of our staff have a love of and passion for animals.

We have been providing loved family pets to the Victorian community for approximately 20 years, and we pride ourselves on providing well-socialised puppies. Upmarket Pets currently holds an animal traders licence issued by the local council, and we willingly adhere to all relevant laws and the Victorian pet shop code of practice, which are amongst the most stringent of anywhere in Australia.

As there are other submitters presenting to the committee about the impact this proposed legislation will have on breeders, we will confine our comments primarily to its impact on pet shops. There are currently only 10 pet shops in Melbourne that sell puppies and kittens. If these proposals become law, pet shops like ours will only be able to sell dogs and cats obtained from an approved source, which would be shelters, carers and pounds — see clause 34 of the bill — and only be able to source dogs that are older than six months of age; this is outlined in new section 63AAD. Our puppies and kittens are routinely sold at between 8 and 12 weeks of age. We would effectively be forced to become a pseudo shelter or pound. Our customers want young puppies and kittens, not older dogs. It is highly likely that Upmarket Pets would close as a result of this change.

Prospective pet owners currently have the right to choose their new pet from a rescue or an adoption. They have the right to choose from pedigree puppies and also pet shop puppies or from the internet. By effectively banning large domestic animal businesses — see clause 22 — as well as banning the sale of puppies and kittens in pet stores — see clause 34 — the supply of puppies to the Victorian community will be significantly reduced. This would result in the removal of one avenue of people's right to choose; an increase in the cost of puppies — we estimate prices to double or treble in the next three to five years, pricing eight-week-old puppies at between \$5000 and \$15 000; an increase in waiting times to have a puppy supplied; significant increases in internet sales; a reduction in the state dog population with reduced pet ownership and knock-on effects to all ancillary pet businesses; a reduction in access to the now well-documented health benefits to the community of pet ownership; and a shift away from our right to afford and own a family pet of our choice.

Some of the requirements for the operation of pet shops include the following. From 1 July 2015, tighter legislation requiring proof of identity of puppy and kitten suppliers, which is then passed on to the RSPCA and council on request, allowing traceback to property of origin. This legislation alone, if policed effectively, would identify and remove illegal suppliers. It also effectively demonstrates that Upmarket Pets is not an outlet for illegal puppy farms, the reason given for banning pet shop puppy sales — see clause 34. All puppies and kittens are vaccinated, microchipped, wormed, treated for fleas, vet checked prior to sale and basic care information is provided. Within seven days of sale the relevant council is notified of the new owner's details, facilitating council registration of new pets. And all aspects of the code of practice for the operation of pet shops.

Banning puppy sales from pet shops would remove the most transparent and monitored sector of the industry. Pet shops are regulated and accountable at pre-sale, time of sale and post-sale. Consumers are protected by legislation, the code of practice and consumer law. The proposed changes will cause rapid growth in online sales, with the consequent negative impacts on regulation, control, animal welfare and consumer protection. We put for your consideration that pet shops should be considered as the solution, not the problem.

Upmarket Pets predominantly sells crossbreed puppies such as toy poodle crosses, cavoodles, Maltese cross, shih tzu cross, chihuahua cross, westy cross, Jack Russell cross and Scottish terrier crosses — breeds of dogs that are very rarely found in shelters or pounds but are in high demand. These breeds are not bred by pedigree breeders and would become extremely difficult to find if larger domestic animal businesses and pet shop sales are banned. Prospective pet owners should retain the right to a range of choices, so they can access a pet that suits their lifestyle, household and preference, whether it be purebred, from a pet shop or a pound and rescue.

Many of our staff are educated, knowledgeable and qualified in a variety of animal fields, including groomers, dog trainers and pet nutrition et cetera. This knowledge is accessible and beneficial to pet owners pre-sale and post-sale.

In conclusion, we welcome the government's desire to stamp out illegal, unregulated puppy farms. However, the banning and closure of pet stores will not achieve this aim. The extremely broad nature of the proposed legislation has brought with it unintended consequences that will spell the death knell of legitimate and properly regulated pet shops and breeders. It will also be potentially detrimental to every prospective pet owner in the future. Regulation of pet shops is as onerous and tough as anywhere in Australia, but because of our overriding love for our animals we will willingly comply with all conditions.

Our final plea to you as members of the Victorian Parliament is please allow us, for the benefit of the Victorian community, to continue to operate our family business and do what we love doing best: selling quality puppies and kittens to loving Victorian homes. Thank you for your time.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Ms Kirby. Dr Hart, is there anything you would like to add?

**Dr HART** — First, I would like to just point out that a review in New South Wales came to the conclusion that the number 10 had no basis or impact on management on a property, so in other words management can be good or bad and is not controlled by any number, let alone the number 10. That inquiry in New South Wales also found that banning pet shops would have no impact on illegal puppy farm supply. Second, I would like to also make the point strongly that the legislation of July 2015 that required the pet shop to retain information and provide it to the council and the RSPCA on request allows absolute feedback of every dog or cat in the pet shop. Therefore for the last 18 months it has been very clear that Upmarket Pets at least has not been a supplier of illegal puppy farm puppies.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Kirby, anything you would like to add?

**Mr KIRBY** — I would like to answer your questions.

**The CHAIR** — Great. We might move on to some questions then. I am interested to get some views, and perhaps, Dr Hart, you might be able to help out. There has been some discussion from witnesses earlier this evening about the welfare of dogs and the like that are sold from pet stores. I am just wondering if you might be able to give us a bit of a broad overview of how the psychological welfare of dogs can be looked after if they are sold from pet stores.

**Dr HART** — I think that the breeding and rearing code of practice refers to socialisation and minimum requirements for that. The pet shop code of practice is extraordinarily stringent as well. Puppies probably are not in pet shops for significantly long amounts of time, but there are still cage requirements et cetera which are conformed to. I think individuals who buy dogs are more or as much responsible for training and how their dog turns out rather than necessarily it being where they were bred. My last dog was from the pet shop. He was a Westie cross. He wore a jumper. He slept on my bed. I loved him. You can happily get a beautiful family pet from a pet shop, the same as you can from a purebred breeder or from adoption, and I do not think that anybody's right to adopt should be legislated away. I do not think anybody's right to get a purebred dog should be legislated away, and I do not think your right to get any of these crossbred dogs should be taken away either.

**The CHAIR** — So the psychological welfare of your last pet that you bought from a pet store — was there any diminished capacity?

**Dr HART** — He loved me, I loved him, he was a good little boy.

**Ms HARTLAND** — Where do you source your puppies from currently?

**Ms KIRBY** — We source from a number of places. If it is a larger breeder, they are domestic animal businesses. If it is a smaller breeder and someone that is a hobby breeder that breeds from home, our requirement is that we get their photo ID, and when the council comes in or the RSPCA comes in and asks for identification, we give all our records to the RSPCA and the council. By doing that, that also means it comes into the code, so then if we sell a puppy or kitten from that hobby breeder, that then gets microchipped and vaccinated and also gets put into the system, where the microchipping details go to the new owner. That also has a microchip and is also followed through.

**Ms HARTLAND** — So when you talk about a large breeder, how many dogs would a large breeder have?

**Ms KIRBY** — More than 10. I think what the law is in Victoria is if you have more than 10, you have to be a domestic animal business, as far as I am aware.

**Ms HARTLAND** — Have you ever been to visit these sites where you source your dogs from?

**Ms KIRBY** — Correct, and also too, the council audits these places. Have you seen how many pages the code of practice is for a domestic animal business?

**Ms HARTLAND** — Yes, I have, and I have also seen a number of photos and videos of puppy farms where animals live in absolute squalid situations, so that is why I am really interested in understanding, I suppose, what your auditing process is about where you source your puppies from. Do you visit all breeders that you buy from? Are you totally convinced that they are all ethical?

**Ms KIRBY** — It is quite hard as a pet store. I can go to someone's house. I do not know what is behind a certain area, because I do not have the ability. By me passing this information to the RSPCA and passing it to the council, they are the people that have got the authority and have got the inspectoral rights to go and inspect their property. Just like someone would buy a puppy online, I can go into the shop, I can go onto their premises, but I cannot dig deeper, if you know what I mean. If it is a one-off purchase, I can go and purchase it. I can go and check it.

**Dr HART** — It should not be the pet shop's role to police or monitor registration of properties. That role belongs to the council, who renew permits.

**Ms HARTLAND** — But I can see that there could be a problem here that you may, with all good intent, be buying an animal from a very large puppy farm and not actually know — —

**Ms KIRBY** — If it is a large puppy farm, I get a domestic animal business registration number.

**Ms HARTLAND** — But I am talking about going to see where these dogs are held and where they are being bred. That is the thing that concerns me. I am not suggesting at all that you are being unethical, but I think there is a gap between the supply to your shop and where they could be possibly coming from. Unless you personally are inspecting them, it is very hard for you to actually be able to say that no animal you have ever sold has come from a large-scale puppy farm that treats the breeding animals badly.

**Ms KIRBY** — Where I have to be careful is that I am a person. I can expect a certain level of care from the people we buy from, and I can also expect a certain level of care from the people we sell to. I cannot play God.

**Dr HART** — To solve that concern, providing more money to councils to do the policing solves that problem. The laws are already in place for registration of properties. If those properties are not up to speed, the RSPCA can be called in. That is all taken care of. The microchipping of every individual allows traceback to property of origin, and we will catch anybody that is not registered. This legislation is not necessarily about being registered or not registered. The terms legal and illegal have been muddled together, effectively banning all large-scale breeding. But there are people who do the right thing. They are going to be put out of business because there are maybe some people that are not doing the right thing. We can put together a more effective and better way of policing than to get rid of everybody.

**Ms HARTLAND** — I think the problem that many of us have is this idea around self-monitoring — —

**Ms KIRBY** — We are happy to — —

**Ms HARTLAND** — Yes, but I am not talking about you, I am talking about your suppliers. You really cannot be totally guaranteed that the people where your animals are coming from are actually treating those animals well, that they are not over-breeding dogs and that they are actually keeping them in good conditions. We have seen the terrible photos et cetera. I do have this problem where you appear to be doing the right thing, but you have actually got no certainty about where your animals are coming from.

**Ms KIRBY** — What I do have is the paperwork and photo ID of the people. I give that information to the RSPCA and I give it to my local council. If you believe there needs to be more monitoring, I am happy to work with more monitoring. When Greg did the *Australia Wide* show, what the Honourable Jaala Pulford, MP, said was, 'We are only going to close down 79 to 80 registered breeders; this will not affect the 10 000 breeders'. I put it to you that there are only 10 pet shops in Victoria. We are all happy — well I know I am; I cannot speak for anyone else — to work with regulators. We are happy to work with all forms of regulation. We are happy to be transparent. If they cannot work with 10 pet stores, how on earth are they going to regulate 10 000 breeders selling online as retail operators?

**Dr HART** — It is also reasonable to say that every individual in a backyard that has one litter and sells the puppies has to register as a domestic animal business. They then fall under this massive number that has to be policed by a new bureaucracy. That is not actually in any way the solution to illegal puppy farms.

**Ms HARTLAND** — It is my understanding that you actually have to have 10 dogs; is that right?

**Dr HART** — No. If you have one litter and sell the puppies or kittens then you have to register as a domestic animal business. Interestingly another anomaly of the legislation is that if I do not sell the puppies and I give them away, then I do not have to register as a business, which I would think is counterintuitive, because if I have to vaccinate, worm, flea, feed well et cetera and want to recover the costs, I have to register as a business. So I would think that we are actually pushing people to not do the right thing and give puppies away so you do not have to register as a business rather than do the right thing.

**Mr BOURMAN** — Thank you for your presentation. What is the procedure of the pet shop if you have a problem with an animal that has been sold, like if it has come down with a health complaint or something?

**Mr KIRBY** — If we have a problem with an animal we have a three-day cooling-off period. We have a seven-day health guarantee also, which allows a buyer, if that animal has not suited the family or if there was a health issue, that they can actually return the dog. In some parts they will lose 25 per cent of the purchase price — —

**Ms KIRBY** — If they simply change their mind.

**Mr KIRBY** — If they simply just change their mind, because there has been some cost involved in actually purchasing the dog and selling the dog — paperwork. These days when we sell a dog — well, we have been microchipping for 14 years now — the amount of administration that comes back on us to actually make sure we are doing the right thing 110 per cent, every day there is paperwork. So we actually have two full-time people working just on doing paperwork.

**Mr BOURMAN** — How many employees do you have on the whole?

**Mr KIRBY** — Over 50.

**Ms KIRBY** — In three businesses.

**Mr KIRBY** — We have three businesses plus a warehouse.

**Mr BOURMAN** — So it is also safe to say not only have you got codes of practice in your own internal things, you are also covered by consumer law as well?

**Mr KIRBY** — Definitely.

**Ms KIRBY** — Correct.

**Mr BOURMAN** — Yes. So there is a recourse if it comes via someone such as yourself, and there is an issue — I do not know what is a reasonable period of time but reasonably down the track — the consumer laws will kick in.

**Mr KIRBY** — Three years.

**Ms KIRBY** — For breeders, if there is a breeding defect.

**Dr HART** — Which clearly would be a problem compared to purchasing on the internet.

**Mr BOURMAN** — Of course, yes — or interstate.

**Mr KIRBY** — And this is what I said on *Australia Wide*. If we are going to change everything to the internet now — because this will be the only way that we will really be able to sell a dog — we have just really caused the problem. We have not fixed the problem.

**Mr BOURMAN** — Not to mention that long before the internet there were substandard puppy farms, so where there is a will there is a way.

**Mr KIRBY** — And the scammers too. The amount of people that have bought dogs and been scanned online is incredible. We are just seeing it every day, more and more and more and more and more. And for big money too. Some people have lost up to \$5000, or \$10 000. Jack Hill, the jockey who fell and had a brain injury, came and bought his dog from us because he had already been scammed twice. His wife said, ‘My doctor said he needs a dog now. Have you got the dog in the shop? I am coming now’. That was because he had already been scammed twice for \$10 000, \$5000 a time.

**Mr BOURMAN** — Okay. So it is safe to say there is a measure of safety from buying through a complying pet shop. Obviously we are going through the problem of not everyone complying, but through a properly complying pet shop there is a measure of safety.

**Mr KIRBY** — Definitely.

**Mr BOURMAN** — Okay.

**Mr KIRBY** — Well, you have got a point. There is nothing that we do not keep for our dogs. We keep every bit of information, and we have information maybe going back as far as well and truly over 10 years.

**Dr HART** — The one good piece of the legislation potentially is requiring microchipping of all dogs and cats at the time of sale. That allows traceback to property of origin. It strikes me as being almost impossible to even talk about illegal puppy farms after that.

**Mr BOURMAN** — It is almost a no-brainer.

**Dr HART** — So therefore why do we close pet shops other than some other reason? Why do we say that 10 is the number that somehow solves animal management issues? You can be cruel to one and not cruel to 100, and the veterinary profession is well aware of that.

**Mr BOURMAN** — On that note, Dr Hart, as a veterinarian do you have any concerns about the way in this case Upmarket Pets keep and sell their animals?

**Dr HART** — No, my concern is more for the future pet-owning population — and I expect to be one of them — and the affordability, the waiting times and all of the other impacts, like the availability of particular types of crossbreds. I have never adopted a dog. It is great for people who want to do it. I have no problem with that. I have never bought a purebred. Everyone should have the right to be able to do that if they want to. But if you do not want to do either of those two things, removing the crossbred population of dogs from the state, reducing dog numbers, is going to drive up price, it is going to drive up waiting times and it is going to mean you cannot get the dog you want when you want it. We live in a society where we probably all believe it is our right to own a family pet and have that be affordable.

**Mr BOURMAN** — The \$64 000 question: as a veterinarian, do you see this legislation having any positive effect on animal welfare overall?

**Dr HART** — My view would be the only good part of the legislation is the microchipping requirement on everybody at the time of sale. I think the two other linchpins — the closure of pet shops and the banning of breeding — are irrelevances. We need to fund either existing councils or start a new bureaucracy to enforce the existing laws, and you will achieve exactly what you want to achieve.

**Mr BOURMAN** — Everyone loves a good bureaucracy. Anyway, thank you for that.

**Mr FINN** — Thank you for coming in this evening. I should declare my interest here. I have a pugaliar. We got her from Lort Smith, and she is the best dog I have ever had. She is wonderful. We also have a cat which we got from the lost dogs and cats home. I will put that out there for what it is worth. What do you say to people who say that we should not be selling new puppies until all the puppies in the Lost Dogs Home are adopted? I understand there is a very high rate of dogs being put down, particularly in previous years — I do not know why I have not seen the latest figures — and particularly in the Lost Dogs Home. What do you say to people who put that view?

**Dr HART** — Encouraging adoption and rescue is an excellent idea. Legislating adoption and rescue is not a good idea.

**Mr FINN** — Why is that?

**Dr HART** — Because you should have the right to choose.

**Mr FINN** — Fair enough. People who have the view that the welfare of the animals might trump, if I can use that word today, the right of the person to choose their animals — what would you say about that?

**Dr HART** — Sorry. Would you ask that again?

**Mr FINN** — The welfare of the animal actually trumps the right to choose of the person who wishes to buy an animal.

**Dr HART** — Should the family not have the right to be able to raise and train a puppy with their kids the way they want to do it rather than having to adopt or rescue an older dog with its potentially inherent behavioural problems or health problems, which is the reason why it is there in the first place?

**Mr FINN** — I am just playing the devil's advocate, that is all, because I have been to the Lost Dogs Home, I have been to Lort Smith and I have seen the dogs and the puppies. I have to say I am not an out-there, fanatical animal rights person or anything like that, but it does distress me when I see dogs that are going to be put down. If I had not come along, my dog was due to be put down a couple of days later. It does distress me somewhat.

**Dr HART** — It is fair to say too that in legislating that families have to adopt and rescue also legislates reduction in their choice of breed. It legislates the age of the animal. I have had my clinics in South Melbourne for the last 20 years. I have seen adoption dogs — where people have to go to obedience training for a year or two years to readjust the dog, sometimes with good results and sometimes with bad results. Some people want to take that challenge on, but not every family wants to and it may not even be appropriate when you have got young children.

**Mr FINN** — Can you guarantee that a dog or a puppy sold at Upmarket Pets will not have those challenges?

**Dr HART** — That would depend on how you decided to raise and train it.

**Ms KIRBY** — Well, I think it depends on the type of breed too. In our pet store we do not sell larger breeds. We do not sell Staffie crosses, and we do not sell kelpie crosses; we sell the small apartment dogs because that is what we do in our area and that is what people want in their homes.

**Mr FINN** — I have seen — not in your pet shops but certainly in other pet shops — dogs in the window, and they seem cramped and they seem, to my way of thinking anyway, not in a very desirable place. In your shops how do you keep your dogs? Firstly, how long — —

**Mr KIRBY** — All of our dogs are kept at the back of the store, for a start, not at the front of the store.

**Mr FINN** — At the back of the store; right, okay.

**Mr KIRBY** — When we did our show on *Australia Wide*, the following day — I have got pictures here, if you want to see, of our store and the puppies — I took a photo just out of curiosity. It was 3.15 in the afternoon, and the public, to me, gave the verdict of what they were thinking at the time, because we had to actually physically stop people coming in our store.

**Mr FINN** — How big is the space at the back of your store where you keep the puppies?

**Mr KIRBY** — I would say it would be — —

**Dr HART** — Adequate would be the right answer.

**Ms KIRBY** — We would like to invite you to come and have a look.

**Mr KIRBY** — Definitely. The truth of the matter is that we are in the Victoria market. We are right opposite Queen Street. We have everybody from — like, this morning I had — security, first thing in the morning coming to have their puppy fix; then we have the ambulances, the drivers come in; then we have the Victorian police coming in. It is like people come to the store to see the puppies, and we socialise puppies with the people. They wear gloves and everything else. Even today the security from RMIT were there, and we were telling them that we were coming to the meeting tonight, and they were going, ‘Well, use us because we come every Wednesday. This is our fix, and this actually takes our mind off everything’, and they play and they cuddle. And you see people when they walk in — children, you know? It is just incredible to see the people’s reaction.

The other thing is that we would not be there 18 years later if we were doing the wrong thing and the public did not like us. We get approximately, we could say, anywhere up to probably over 7 million people a year through our door. Do you know what I mean? The Victoria market produces over 9½ million people flowing through. The council, the RSPCA and the public are all viewing us 24/7. We have staff nearly 24/7 watching every dog. A dog cannot even poo without a poo being picked up, do you know what I mean? Virtually — we are watching it. So we take great pride in owning a pet store.

I have been working in a pet store since I was nine years old. My father was a real estate agent for 45 years — a licensed real estate agent. I was brought up in Studley Park, Kew, and believed that I was going to be a real estate agent. I never left the pet shop in Kew. I left school when I was 13 and have been running pet stores ever since. I am proud of what I have done, and I have brought up six children with that and brought them up through the business.

**Mr FINN** — What would the legislation, as it currently stands, do to you if it was passed? What would it do to your business?

**Mr KIRBY** — Well, there would be no doubt that we could not run the business at all, because we could not bring dogs in at six months of age, for a start. Secondly, we could not find the dogs suitable for city living. I know you said you have seen a lot of puppies in the pound. I am yet to see them or any puppies that we think would be really suitable. We are not going to bring in a border collie or a kelpie or even a Staffie, for that matter. We went down all that line 10 years ago, and we stopped doing all of those things. We are in the year 2016 now — do you know what I mean? — and we are providing what the public actually wants. We do not buy dogs that we cannot sell, because we need those puppies. The council can prove this, with microchipping: most of our puppies are sold before they even hit the store, and if they are there for more than a week, it is quite unusual.

That is why the public come every week, to see these different puppies. I would have on the list now — I would say I would not be exaggerating if I said if I had the right breed of dog today I could sell 1000 dogs today, there is such a shortage of dogs. Because a lot of people do not want pound dogs, I am afraid. They are not suitable for their lifestyle, and even I as a professional — I call myself a professional dog trainer, person, breeder — could tell you about any animal, I believe, how that animal is and how it looks, just by looking at it. Because 40 years of practice gives you a lot. This is right through, from fish, birds, reptiles. I have known nothing else my whole life. When you see a person also come in that you do not think is suitable for that animal or you do not think that is suitable for their home, I do not have any fear in saying, ‘We’re not selling you the animal’.

**Mr FINN** — So you actually refuse to sell an animal to a person that you believe to be unsuitable?



**Mr KIRBY** — Of course; definitely. If I see somebody that is drug orientated, drunk, thinks it is a joke or they just hold the puppy and they do not know how to hold the puppy — do you know what I mean? — then they have to go through some sort of training. Even with a lot of our students, and Asian students especially — we have Asian workers that actually go to the homes, set up their homes for them. Like I said, we would not be here 18 years later if the public thought we were doing something wrong. We are the largest pet store in Victoria for selling pets. We have a huge range of pet stores. Even the late Lord Mayor used to come in and say to me — John So, and he was very hard to understand — ‘You are adding so much to Victoria. We have so many tourists that come through here and say how wonderful it is to still see puppies in pet stores’.

**Dr HART** — Could I just add on to the answer to your previous question? On the perception that somehow pet shop puppies are diseased, sickly, weak, psychologically disturbed, it is actually probably fair to say the opposite is true. You will have other veterinarians, I am presuming, appearing and submissions explaining to you that the more you pure breed dogs the more you bring out recessive diseases. There is genetically a thing called hybrid vigour. Hybrid vigour is that when you are crossbred, you are genetically stronger. So my concern for the dog population is if we force pure breeding because they are close to the only dogs available, that we actually make weaker the genetic stock of the dog population, rather than encouraging puglies, cavoodles, spoodles, labradoodles. All the designer crossbred dogs are actually really good genetically for the dog population.

**Ms HARTLAND** — I doubt very much that you are going to be able to answer this — we may need to get this from the lost dogs home — but how many dogs are actually bought in pet shops and then abandoned because people do not know what they should be doing, that impulse buying aspect? I do not think you can answer that, but I think it is one we should follow up with the lost dogs home.

**Dr HART** — I can answer that for you. Dr Doug Black, who will appear I believe later, was a co-founder of Trovan microchips and Central Animal Records. I asked him the question a couple of weeks ago. Nobody has done any research or got any figures at the pounds to identify where the pound dogs are coming from. I am sure Greg would argue that on breed-related status alone they are not from the pet shop; they are from other sources, because they are not pet shop breeds.

**Ms KIRBY** — Actually, when you ask, I would like to know, too.

**Ms HARTLAND** — It will be on public transcript.

**Ms KIRBY** — What we would also like to say on that matter is we would be really, really happy — if someone does buy a puppy from our pet store, we are willing to take it back.

**Mr KIRBY** — And we will rehome it at our cost, not at the pound’s cost.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for your attendance and the evidence you have provided to the committee. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript of evidence for proofreading, and it will ultimately make its way onto the committee’s website. Once again, thank you for your attendance this evening.

**Committee adjourned.**