

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Inquiry into the legislative and regulatory framework relating to restricted breed dogs

Melbourne — 24 November 2015

Members

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Mr Brad Griggs, Canine Services International.

The CHAIR — I declare open the Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure public hearing. I extend a welcome to everybody who is present here today. I will begin by explaining that the committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the restricted breed dogs inquiry. I welcome Mr Griggs, who is going to be providing some evidence before us today. I will remind you that all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you may say in here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by the same privilege.

Mr Griggs, I see that you have a PowerPoint presentation. I ask you to begin your presentation, and at the conclusion of that we will have some questions from the committee. I will hand over to you, Mr Griggs. We can be quite informal, so you can refer to us by first names if you like.

Visual presentation.

Mr GRIGGS — I appreciate that. My understanding of this is that we have approximately 45 minutes to get through this. I have tried to keep this as brief as possible, which I must admit for a subject that I am so passionately involved in and which is so information intensive has been quite a challenge. I run Canine Services International. In some format I have been working with dogs professionally for approximately the last 13 years. It is quite difficult writing down all that stuff about yourself, I can tell you.

My background is as a professional dog trainer initially. I was qualified through the National Dog Trainers Federation, and I have since gone on to become their operations manager. I have now moved away from that role, but I am still heavily involved with the organisation as a member of their board of consultants in a number of areas — the board of consultants is like a guiding committee, I guess — including law enforcement, type dog training, canine behaviour, obedience training, that type of area. I have been heavily involved with the accreditation process. They run the certificate III in dog training and behaviour, which is Australia's only specific education in that area, and I have been heavily involved in that accreditation process. I do a growing amount of expert witness work in Victorian courts.

If you are going to sum up what I do, more or less I am a canine behaviour specialist or a canine behaviourist. My specialty is not in the academic area. I do what I can to keep up, but I certainly do not claim to be an academic. I am also a canine welfare advocate. I do not think that one can work professionally with dogs, ethically, if one is not an advocate for the welfare of dogs. I have got formal qualifications, including the ridiculous visual breed ID course that is run by Dogs NSW — it is a formal government-accredited unit of competency — security and risk assessment, occupational health and safety, government investigations, statutory compliance, training and evaluation. That is my background there.

Obviously I have been involved in calling for a change in the way that dogs are managed in our community. For as long as I can remember I have been involved in it in some format, but I really decided to get on the front foot and start doing more in 2011, around the time that poor Ayen Chol died. There are a few photos there working with a government agency in relation to dog bite prevention. Dog bite prevention is an increasingly large part of my business, so demonstrations and what have you.

On looking at the esteemed names that have been involved in providing the panel with evidence, it struck me when I was preparing my presentation that I probably have a fair point of difference to many of them, and that is my involvement with dogs that bite and my understanding of dogs that bite, why they bite, shaping that behaviour, so in a law enforcement-type sense, dogs that the police may take on, special forces, that type of thing. I am heavily involved in furthering my skill set interstate with that work.

That is a photo of me during the development of a law enforcement dog in Sydney. When we are talking about dog bites I would ask the panel to consider that I have a very good understanding of what makes dogs bite. I also have a very good understanding of what it is like to be bitten.

Mr FINN — Ow!

Mr GRIGGS — That is the result of a training exercise. It was understood that that would occur as part of that sequence there. I am not the only one that does this. It is a fairly specialised field. When I talk about dog bites and when I talk about the absolute risk and the relative risk, I would ask you to consider that I have perhaps a unique perspective of what it is like to be bitten and the type of damage that can be done.

Obviously I am aware of, broadly speaking, the terms of reference of the panel and of course we are here to discuss BSL and restricted breed legislation. I do not think that we can practically separate the two in any meaningful way. Breed-specific legislation has failed all over the world and continues to fail. It is a losing proposition. In some cases where that legislation has been in place it has actually correlated with an increase in dog bites, including fatalities. It is a hugely costly exercise, and I give this more as background. I am sure that all of the esteemed panel members are privy to far more data than I about the actual financial costs associated with breed-specific legislation. But let us look at a couple that I gleaned from *Hansard* and the transcripts.

In two cases alone — in Knox, I think it was Mr Dickson who estimated a cost of \$600 000 to defend a case, and Mylo was estimated to cost somewhere in the vicinity of \$300 000 — we are looking at the better part of \$1 million just for the prosecution of two dogs. In this context they would be purely based on how they look, not based on how they behave.

Communities pay a large fee: hospitals, legal fees, lost work time and productivity. Families — legal fees cripple families. I have seen families go to the wall to defend their family dog. Australians have a love affair with dogs. I am sure we all know this. Many of you, I have been able to see, actually own dogs and enjoy a relationship with a dog — lucky you. It legitimately causes mental anguish, and it is a shame that we have not seen evidence associated with that from a member of the psychology profession.

It costs dogs their lives. Dogs are highly social creatures, and when a dog is declared menacing — —

I will preface this. As I will say later, I actually very much support having a menacing dog measure. Any progressive animal management system has to have these measures to call people to account, to call them to action to change the behaviour of their dog. I am not criticising that fact, but menacing restrictions greatly affect the ability to effectively train and socialise a dog. In many cases the issues that cause dogs to be menacing in the first instance relate to a lack of positive social interactions and a lack of alternative trained responses that are incompatible with the problem behaviour.

And of course reputation. The panel has been involved in seeking international opinion here, and you may well be aware that on the world stage our animal management system is something of a laughing stock. That is certainly not overstating it; I am being quite nice about it. The world seems to regard us as a pretty easygoing sort of a nation and to some degree fairly progressive, I guess. Certainly our reputation in this regard is not in line with that image.

So when we consider all of the costs that are associated with it, the question that I ask myself is: cui bono? Who benefits? Realistically, the only people who seem to benefit from this are the animal management service providers. I will mention that a little more later on, so I will move on for the sake of time. But we really need to ask ourselves who benefits, because it is clearly not the community. We have had an increase of 197 per cent in dog bites over the last 15 years. When you adjust that for population I have been informed that that still comes out to a 133 per cent increase. I find that quite confronting. I find that very confronting.

You will notice that there are three vertical grey lines on that graph. It may interest you to know that those lines indicate strengthening of breed-specific legislation. There is a bit of a trend there. The trend is that they all correlate with rises. These are admissions for hospital dog bites; I should have prefaced that. This information has been obtained from VISU, and I am informed that this graph has been updated with the very latest information available to us. Those bite statistics continue to rise, and the stronger we make breed-specific legislation, the more they appear to rise.

Dog bites in Victoria sit somewhere around 43 per 100 000 people, as I understand it — more than double that of Calgary. The major victims are children under the age of four and between five and nine. They are the two most represented groups. As we go any further with this we also need to be careful. To have a productive discourse about this we need to work hard to separate breed versus type, behaviour versus appearance and restricted breed versus dangerous dog. A type is a physical appearance. A breed is an acknowledged bloodline of animals; it has a genetic basis. We also need to separate behaviour and appearance, because what we are talking about with breed-specific legislation is that in Victoria we are conflating breed and type — very conveniently, for those who support breed-specific legislation. And behaviour and appearance are conflated. In fact that is the basis of breed-specific legislation. What we are saying is that how a dog looks is how a dog behaves. I have a beard. I do not say all the high c's. I do not carry an axe. I do not eat meat from the bone, often — Ange tells me off.

And restricted breed versus dangerous dog: even councils conflate these two terms. There is an argument that councils should be the last ones to conflate these two terms. I just want to acknowledge that a restricted breed is simply a breed or, in the Victorian case, a breed and/or physical type of dog. That designation is given based on the preconception that they are in some way more dangerous than other breeds or other types. A dangerous dog is a dog whose behaviour has shown him to be a danger to our community, and he has been designated as such. Forgive me for covering that old ground. I am sure you have sat through similar stuff many times.

It is a fact — all available evidence shows — that breed-specific legislation is a comprehensive failure in Victoria and internationally. I thought about being a little theatrical and handing you all a stack of studies that refute breed-specific legislation either in whole or in parts. I erred against that. What I would challenge you all to do is to go and find one study that supports it — a solid study that is well designed that supports breed-specific legislation. We are here, as I understand it, to gather evidence today, and so I am very focused on evidence.

BSL was never introduced based on evidence, fact or data because such data does not exist. The reason that we do not see statistics show up in court relating to breeds being involved in dog bites is because they do not exist. Reliable statistics do not exist. People with statistical expertise can easily tear them apart in court. The majority of the time it is simply the opinion of the person who is taking the report or the opinion of the poor person who may have been involved in an incident where they felt threatened or they have been harmed.

So given that we know that it does not work and given that we know that no such evidence upon which to base a decision like that exists, my question is: how do we turn this situation around? We need answers, which is obviously why we are here. I came up with these on the internet, and I think they are incredibly poignant:

We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.

And:

A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light but rather because its opponents eventually die and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.

I could not resist including them. I understand that it may be a little different to some of the other presentations that you have had, but I really think that we need to consider that.

Enter Bill Bruce and the Calgary model. Bill is a close friend of mine — Mr Bruce is a close personal friend of mine — pictured there with my dog. I am proud to know someone like Bill. In my life I endeavour to surround myself with excellent people — people who have the qualities that I aspire to — and Bill certainly fits that mould for me. He is a man who took a system that was not working and simply said, 'Right. What do the key stakeholders — the public — want? Oh, they want to be safe. Okay, cool. What do we do now? Well, let's go and find the best people that we can and listen to what they have to say, and let's take their answers and turn that into a plan that is actionable'. How can I not admire that?

Now, interestingly, Bill retired in 2012, and when he retired Calgary stumbled. But there is a lesson for us to learn here. Bill's successor made some noteworthy changes to the Calgary model. That involved cancelling education programs and removing educational officer positions; interagency communication and interjurisdictional training ceased, and so did interjurisdictional help with particularly horrific dog bite investigations; emphasis on investigations and enforcement was de-emphasised; and, very interestingly, media relations by his successor were almost non-existent. And what was the result of that? As we would expect, when we look at the world experience, dog bite statistics rose along with reports of dog bites.

Every year the City of Calgary published increasingly excellent — and in the end it was just so good it was pretty steady — dog bite statistics. But in the year that Bill's successor took over they did not publish dog bite statistics. That is an anomaly, and it is an anomaly that bears a little bit of examination. The key elements of Calgary's celebrated model were changed, and the numbers changed accordingly. So what can we surmise from this? Well, obviously leadership is critical to success, whatever the model. The success of Calgary's model is dependent upon all of the elements. I will say that again, because I think it is so important: the success of Calgary's model is dependent on all elements. Education is one of the cornerstones of Calgary's success.

It is often not the case that voluntary compliance is prized in the same way in animal management here in Victoria. Let us face it, voluntary compliance does not work all the time. People keep animals in a

non-compliant fashion. There are going to be some aberrant individuals who fail to comply with what is responsible in terms of their stewardship of those animals, right? And effective enforcement needs to be applied in those situations.

Now I should say that I have some experience working in the animal management community. I am aware that you have heard evidence from Knox City Council, Casey City Council and Mitchell Shire Council. I trained all of their animal management officers in roughly the last 12 months, and for many more that made submissions to you my business name appears as being a training provider or I am referenced directly or indirectly. I probably run the most comprehensive dog bite prevention education program in the country at this point. Without sort of patting myself on the back, I have worked very hard to see that it is considered the gold standard.

We have people consult on that. We have current and former military people involved with Canine. We have tactical operators, neuropsychologists and people with doctorates in human-canine interaction. There is no excellence in isolation and I did not do all of it on my own, but it is my program and I am very proud of it. So I have some idea about how the animal management community operates. I also work for the prosecution and for the defence in a number of cases. You have also heard information from Melke Legal, and I have provided consultancy to Melke Legal in relation to canine behaviour, as well as Melke Legal's clients.

So given that all this is the case, I turn to the Victorian model. I understand that Mr Bruce discussed the elements of why Calgary was successful. Have you all read the *Victoria's Future in Responsible Canine Guardianship* paper? If you have not, may I suggest that you give it a read? It was put together by Bill Bruce, myself and two wonderful women — Melanie Isaacs, who is an animal management officer in New South Wales, and another amazing woman named Megan Liddicoat, who is a qualified dog trainer and also a scientist. In that paper we ask that Victoria develop its own Victorian model based on the underlying principles of what works for Calgary. As Bill ran you through, not everything they do fits exactly into us; we need to modify it to make it work for us. But the Victorian model would be evidence driven in all areas to have something that we could be proud of. To have something that is contemporary, progressive, humane and effective, it must be evidence driven in all areas. Anecdotal evidence is not really going to cut it when there is such a preponderance of good-quality evidence available. It is education based. Voluntary compliance is prized. There is absolute owner onus, and we will reference that a little later with the responsible canine guardianship model — the two pillars of that — that we put forward in this paper. It involves clear and consistent expectations, and it also recognises that dogs are created *sui generis*.

Mr ONDARCHIE — In a class of their own!

Mr GRIGGS — Each of them is very, very individual. As a dog behaviour guy I am in a privileged position: I get to work with litters of puppies. And because of my specific skill sets I get to work with puppies and get to contribute to programs that are absolutely dedicated to breeding behavioural excellence towards these types of roles. It is very difficult. If you talk to people who breed dogs for — the word has escaped my mind — confirmation showing, so beauty shows for dogs, beauty pageants for dogs, they will talk about top lines and they will talk about movement and they will talk about the roach in the back and they will talk about coat length and they will talk about all these things, but when people are breeding dogs for working ability, it is a very complex set-up. It is not only about the physical expression of that genetic potential, which is relatively straightforward in many regards, but it is about complex interactions between the dog and the environment — the epigenetic effect.

Genetics only ever provides, even in the very best breedings that have a very high success rate — say, 70 per cent or above — a potential for response, and it is very important that we understand that. Genetics does not provide a definitive road map. Has anyone seen the movie *Gattaca*? If you have not, I would suggest watching it because it is really quite relevant. Genetics are not destiny; they are just potential for response. What we understand more and more about in genetics is that our genetics function like a bank of light switches — things turn on and off depending upon some of the experiences that we have and the associated changes in our systems.

We maintain that there are five pillars of safe, humane, effective and progressive canine legislation: absolute owner onus — the responsible guardianship of the canine — pushes voluntary compliance. There are clear and consistent expectations. Some of this is consistent with the slide previously. Penalise where and as appropriate, and act with transparency in policy development and the execution of those policies and review of the efficacies

associated with them. Interestingly, because we do not have appropriate statistics available to us, we cannot really judge the efficacy of the policies that are in place, as I touched on much earlier.

When it comes to responsible canine guardianship, that hinges around two key points, which is recognition of the dog as a companion animal. Currently dogs are considered to be livestock. I am sure all of you will be painfully familiar with the term ‘pet ownership’. Ownership of something — I own my car, but I am the guardian of my dog. I do not consider that dogs have the same rights as human beings — that is not my position — but I have a greater responsibility to my dog than I have to my car. My car does not think — it is not a Mercedes! — and my car does not feel. My car does not feel pain; dogs do, as I am sure you are all painfully aware.

Of course complete owner onus for the dog’s behaviour and its outcomes — that involves keeping the dog in a compliant fashion, ensuring the physical health of the dog, ensuring the psychological health of the dog, and responsibility for the dog’s behaviour, including appropriate levels of liability and an onus on training that dog to fit in and make sense of society. I am sure we have all been to a dinner party or a function at some stage where we have not quite known what to say, or perhaps we have said something and it is a little bit off or we did not handle a certain situation as well as we would have liked to. I will probably leave here today thinking the same thing myself. We are human beings; we have massive frontal lobes in our brains. We are capable of some very complex reasoning. Dogs do not have that same level of understanding, and realistically the positions they are put in and the behaviours that they are trained to exhibit or they are trained away from exhibiting or even discouraged from exhibiting largely come down to the stewardship of the human being. If we do not show them something different, the only responses that they are left to are going to be about their interaction with the environment.

So as far as the state goes, the position of myself and my co-authors is that when it comes to facilitating reform we need a paradigm shift. As those slides said earlier, we cannot fix the problems that we have using the thinking that we used to use. That deals with removing those dogmatic preconceptions. When I was reading through some of the notes — I will not name the person, but they are in there. I do not wish to cause any disrespect. But I was disappointed to read that reference was made during evidence to the panel in relation to locking jaws and that an animal management officer said that that was something that needed to be considered. I am paraphrasing there. ‘Disappointed’ does not really fit it; I was shocked. I had been involved in the training of that organisation, and I specifically discussed this with them during all my training programs. Lockjaw is tetanus; it is a serious medical condition, and it should be treated. The jaws of all the breeds and all the types that are currently discriminated against — without significant basis, I might add — are the same as any other dog’s jaws. They work the same way.

In association with that paradigm shift, what we need to do is reverse-engineer a solution, in the same way that Bill Bruce did. What does the key stakeholder — the public — want? They want to be safe. So we now need to reverse-engineer that. The trouble is that, if you recall those three iterations of breed-specific legislation that were on the graph earlier, you can put lipstick on a pig but it is still a pig. It is just a pig wearing lipstick.

The CHAIR — Mr Riggs, I am just aware that we have only got about 7 minutes or so until our allotted time is finished.

Mr GRIGGS — Have I been going that long?

The CHAIR — I think it would be great if the committee could have some time to ask some questions. So if you want to take a couple of minutes to finish your presentation, then we can get into some questions.

Mr GRIGGS — Thank you for the rush along. It feels like about 5 minutes.

The CHAIR — Sure. No worries.

Mr GRIGGS — Appropriate resourcing needs to be given. We need to work on improving the knowledge and the skills — a case in point being that lockjaw scenario — and on improving our information systems, such as incident recording and investigation. There is no standardised template for investigation. If you look at the city of Calgary, there are 200 points gathered. There was a horrendous dog bite in Ferntree Gully; that dog is now dead. If it was a murder investigation and people were destroying evidence, there would be a furore and people would be charged with that. But how are we supposed to examine what actually happened and avoid it in

the future if we are killing one of our key pieces of evidence. We put it in a hole in the ground and we never look at it again.

The evaluation of temperament is very interesting. We need to develop a contemporary awareness of temperament evaluation. It is much more of an art than a science. People need to be trained to apply that, and appropriately qualified and experienced people need to be sourced. Too often the people that are charged with this have very little experience in that regard.

The document recommends the formation of a companion animal management reform task force, with five full-time or equivalent appropriately qualified and experienced staff with a five-year minimum appointment. It requires a courageous commitment to evidence-based policy formation; a systemic focus on education, encouraging better welfare outcomes for the community and for dogs; much better data collection and investigation, as we discussed; support for owners and councils to facilitate collaboration and efficiencies wherever possible; and we also need to revise trainer accreditation.

Pound reform is essential — I know I am rushing now, Mr Morris. Pound reform is essential. Currently speaking, because we have private providers, it could be argued that there is a tendency towards the status quo. There was a law that stopped vets from returning dogs to their owners. Realistically the only people that that serves are the contract animal management service providers. It does not make the vet's life any easier. It does not make the pet's life any easier. It does not make the owner's life any easier. Indeed a drive-home policy for a dog that is not on its property and has not been adequately contained and kept in a compliant fashion offers the very first frontline opportunity for that animal management officer to go and deliver that dog home, have a look at why it got out, speak with the people about how they are keeping the dog and prevent things from happening further on.

We certainly need a review of the for-profit arrangements, specifically in relation to the metrics that indicate their success. They should be rewarded for rehoming and for returning to owner. There should be no reward for high kill rates. We need a structure to facilitate working with community networks to reduce killing, because there is a lot of killing that goes on. The term 'euthanasia' is often used, but it does not fit the dictionary definition of that. And we need to improve pet retention rates so that less pets wind up in our pounds.

We also really need to look at part of this because how dogs are trained largely dictates how they behave in our communities. It teaches humans and dogs to share a language and read each other properly, if you will. The National Dog Trainers Federation applied to become an organisation approved by the minister back in 2011. That is a very close quote from Tracy Helman, who was the director at the time, who described the process as 'deliberately difficult'. The organisation, and specifically Tracy Helman, were obtuse in the way they dealt with this. There were weeks of work that went into it. The first draft was done; they gave us no guidance on it. They sent it back and said, 'No, you need to include all of this', and sent us an information sheet that they should have sent us the first time.

Currently the way things work, the system is outdated and without merit. We need to acknowledge the true key stakeholders in the dog training and behaviour field. We also need to acknowledge specific qualifications, and we need to reject ideological underpinnings. We need to consider the whole of the science. There is a movement that says it is wrong to ever punish a dog or it is wrong to ever say no to a dog. There is a movement to outlaw any training device that does not fit within their narrow idea. Unfortunately this is gaining popularity, but popularity is no measure of validity in this regard. So we need to reject that. Organisations such as Delta Society are right at the coalface, and I feel that there is a heavy conflict of interest in that regard because they tend to be a closed referral circuit that generates a lot of money yearly.

This graph really sums up where I feel we are at. The National Canine Research Council did a study about dog bite fatalities in the US. Here the last one we had was in 2011, and now we are looking at this. I will provide this slide to you so that you can go over the numbers, but the bottom line is this: in 84.5 per cent of cases at least four of those factors were present, and in only 2.5 per cent only one was present. None of them involve breed. And these are the worst of the worst situations.

Sorry for taking so long. Thank you for hearing me out.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Mr Griggs. I will open it to questions from the committee.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Brad, clearly you are very passionate about this.

Mr GRIGGS — Thank you, Sir.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Canine Services International? What international experience do you have?

Mr GRIGGS — I have trained dogs in New Zealand. I am very connected. I am heading over to America later this year to work with a number of dogs.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Okay. So it is limited to New Zealand in terms of your international experience.

Mr GRIGGS — How do you mean, Sir?

Mr ONDARCHIE — So you have only worked in New Zealand when you talk about working internationally.

Mr GRIGGS — I consult to overseas. Absolutely.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Okay. You said in your submission that Victoria is internationally ridiculed.

Mr GRIGGS — Correct.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Who is ridiculing us?

Mr GRIGGS — I could not give you an actual list.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Okay.

Mr GRIGGS — Do you require a — —

Mr ONDARCHIE — No, no. You just said it, and I was just interested who is ridiculing us.

Mr GRIGGS — In the dog training and behaviour field everyone understands that this is a losing proposition. Everybody who has the slightest understanding of dog behaviour understands that how a dog looks does not dictate how it behaves.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I understand that. I was just going back to your point about being internationally ridiculed. I was just trying to understand where we are being internationally ridiculed, but anyway — —

Mr GRIGGS — Okay: America, Canada, Britain, Italy, Germany, and the list goes on.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Do you support the view of the owner last night who decided to put their dog to sleep after the Ferntree Gully incident?

Mr GRIGGS — I think it is a very understandable response. I am not saying that it is wrong or it is right; I am not in that position. However, what it does do is it robs us of the ability to examine that animal and find answers to stop it happening again.

When Ayen Chol died, I met her father, and I looked him in the eye and I shook his hand and I promised him — I gave him my word as a gentleman — that I would do everything that was within my power to prevent the same thing happening to somebody else's child. We are not doing everything that we can; we are not doing even a small percentage of what we can. We are doing things that we can prove with our hospital admissions data are not working.

There was a move a couple of years ago to have something of a state research centre housed at Animal Aid, where these dogs would be sent and they would have appropriately qualified handlers, and testing and observation could be done to try and learn from these types of things. I do not know whatever came of that, but I think that would be a wonderful initiative.

Mr ELASMAR — Brad, thank you very much. Just following up this matter, I am interested in the education as well. I believe that the local government has adopted the canine program and that council are now

providing your canine program. Are there any courses for owners or officers or anything like that to educate them?

Mr GRIGGS — Officers as in animal management officers?

Mr ELASMAR — Yes.

Mr GRIGGS — Yes. That is what that course is — for animal management officers. I also offer a course called Responsible Canine Guardianship, and I offer that to people — so, dog owners.

Mr ELASMAR — And councils should provide education to owners as well; is that your opinion?

Mr GRIGGS — No. Most council officers are grossly underqualified and under-resourced to provide that. I am currently in discussion primarily with one council, with strong interest from another two, about providing a pilot program to some of their people. I do not want to mention them, but they are a high-incident council with a large animal management department, and we are having serious discussions — it is always along — about providing something along those lines.

DOGS Victoria represent pedigree dogs in Victoria, and they are part of obviously dogs Australia in a national sense. Their relevance is grossly overstated, and they are far over relied upon by government in terms of delivering these programs. Unfortunately their dog training expertise relates to competitive training. It primarily is designed to head towards the pedigree dog type of set-up, with all but one exception, which would be Rally O. The curriculums that they put the dogs through have very little to do with how dogs think or perceive the world and are necessarily well handled. They are very traditional in their nature. I will commend any training for a dog — it is a great starting place — but currently the government sort of looks at DOGS Victoria as a go-to, and I do not think that that is healthy for us heading into the future. Most dogs do not fit that model, and most people have no involvement with them, and the largest number of dogs will never have anything to do with them.

Ms TIERNEY — I just want to go back to the Calgary model. We have all recognised that there has been a bit of a spike with dog bites since Bill Bruce's retirement, and you have indicated that there are some reasons for that. Can you provide the evidence for that in terms of the reduction of education and the low priority for media? Because if they are significant issues, we need to try and get some measure on that. I think it will assist us in our deliberations.

Mr GRIGGS — A large part of that I have gleaned from conversations with people involved in that model. I do not have any direct paperwork relating to those, but I would be happy to work with the panel in getting some hard evidence to you about what was reduced and removed. I think it will be a bit of a process, but I would certainly be very happy to work with you to get you that information.

Ms TIERNEY — Thank you.

Mr GRIGGS — For me to put my name to it, I am very sure of the quality of that information. It is an integrity thing for me, and the source that I got it from is of the highest integrity, so I am confident that we can find it. It is just what we have to go through to get it and how we find it.

Mr FINN — Brad, thank you for your evidence here today. As somebody who dearly loves his dog, it is great to hear somebody who is very enthusiastic about them as well. From what you have told us today, there is no evidence that links any particular breed more than others to attacks; is that what you are telling us?

Mr GRIGGS — We have no Australian statistics. I am not a statistician, but I have some basic understanding, and I will try and share that with you. The source of the statement of breed that is attached to a given incident tends to be reported by a person. Indeed, a case in point: I have clients who talk to me about their dog being attacked. They tell me that it was attacked by a pit bull. They go on to described a dog that is like 50 kilos and black with a white head. That is not what an American pit bull terrier looks like. What they are really saying is 'a scary dog', and the name 'pit bull', because of the way that the media reports it — and quite honestly the way that the government approaches this breed-specific legislation policy — strikes terror into the hearts of people. It is now even being used as an adjective beyond just talking about breed and type. This is the problem that we have with these statistics. Here in Australia we do not have a standardised investigative

template. We do not have a national register; we do not have a central register for these incidents. It gets very, very difficult to ascertain breed.

Mr FINN — Are there any statistics overseas which would indicate that there is no link between specific breeds and attacks?

Mr GRIGGS — Sorry, can I ask you to state that again?

Mr FINN — Are there any statistics or are there any figures from overseas which show no evidence of a link between attacks and particular breeds?

Mr GRIGGS — Please forgive me if I am missing something: is there any evidence that shows no link?

Mr FINN — Yes.

Mr GRIGGS — There was a study — now I have to remember where the study was from. I am quite happy to provide you the information afterwards. It was an early start this morning.

The CHAIR — If you would like to take that question on notice, we could get a further response.

Mr FINN — Just one last question — —

Mr GRIGGS — Sorry, if I can just say they took 2000 dogs that fit those types of dogs that cause concern and held it against the control group, which was golden retrievers in the same number, and no statistical difference in aggressive behaviour was found. I think that goes some way towards dealing with that.

Mr FINN — Thank you. We had, in a recent hearing, some suggestion that in fact we should have registration of owners, or guardians of dogs, as you refer to them — —

Mr ONDARCHIE — Or restricted breeding.

Mr FINN — Or restricted breeding indeed — that is a damn fine idea. Do you regard that as a reasonable thing? Do you think that there are some people who just should not have dogs or be allowed to have dogs?

Mr GRIGGS — I applaud the spirit of the ideal behind that idea. Here is where I have a bit of a problem with it: most people have never done anything wrong, and we should not treat them like they have done something wrong. There is actually no need for that system. We have seen overseas tremendous success without reliance upon that. Having said that, do I think that there should be a formal requirement for licensing of the person? No. However, I certainly think that there should be excellent resourcing available — that is so available that someone could not help but trip over it and find it and be directed to it — that actually encourages the development of that in people.

I am proud to be the founder of an organisation named ANZCA — Australian and New Zealand Cynopraxic Association. We are quite young; we have got around 150 members at the moment. We actually have plans to release something like that to the public free of charge, just helping them to learn how to keep their dogs in a compliant fashion and learn a little bit about how dogs think and behave and whatever else. Our vision is that they will be able to access that very easily, and they will actually be able to measure their success online or similar — maybe post something in. Hopefully by engaging people in that way we can begin to sort of drip good information out to them.

Mr FINN — Thank you.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Some people breed dogs for evil and not good.

Mr GRIGGS — Absolutely.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Are there any specific breeds that are being bred, unfortunately, for fighting?

Mr GRIGGS — I am certain that there are many breeds that are being bred specifically for fighting, most likely based on the performance of specific individuals within them. Having said that, there is a degree of

speculation on my behalf because I am not involved with the dogfighting world, so I cannot comment absolutely definitively.

Mr ONDARCHIE — You are a bit of an expert. Are there any specific breeds that these people look at to breed for fighting?

Mr GRIGGS — Interestingly, no.

Mr ONDARCHIE — No?

Mr GRIGGS — No, overwhelmingly. What we seem to find is that people go for a type. If they think that the dog looks a certain way, then perhaps they tend to choose that, but the humble staffie — —

Mr ONDARCHIE — Yes, but they are not breeding Chihuahuas, Brad, are they, for fighting?

Mr GRIGGS — I am not part of it, but I would find that hard to believe. If you told me that they were, I would scoff at that idea.

Mr ONDARCHIE — No, I am saying they would not be — would they?

Mr GRIGGS — No, I would not think that that would be likely. There are probably 30 of us in the room, and based on statistics 15 of us probably own staffords. They are one of the most popular breeds out there. They are really great little family dogs. Over here we look at them lovingly; over in Britain they are reviled. Even though they are a very distinct breed from an American pit bull terrier, they are latched onto by people seeking status, and that is a problem that they have to deal with there. It is a problem about image as opposed to a problem about dogs, if that makes sense.

Another thing that is really important to note is that there is some evidence that shows that you can breed an aggressive dog within three generations very easily. I have seen the products in multiple breeds of very poor breeding. This is one of the reasons that I so absolutely support the ending of puppy mills and the sale of puppies in pet shops. I see these horrendous breedings of all types of breeds where these dogs are, I guess, what we would call thin nerved and fear biters. These dogs can become very dangerous. A lot of people, with good intent, buy these dogs, yet they wind up with these serious problems. They wind up investing a lot of time and effort into trying to change that dog's perception of the world and trying to manage that dog appropriately.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Generally speaking are there any specific breeds that people look at for that?

Mr GRIGGS — In the example that I have just given, no. I have seen examples of golden retrievers; I have seen examples of labradors, pointers. I have been doing this for 13 years, and more or less my specialty tends towards high-performance dogs and aggressive-type dogs, so I see and hear all types of stories. I recently defended a whippet in court in relation to aggressive behaviour. Stereotypically, people consider whippets to be meek and mild dogs, but at the end of the day they are just dogs.

Mr ONDARCHIE — One final question, Brad, do I not own my dog any more? I mean, now it is 'guardian' — what?

Mr GRIGGS — I would contend that under the model of responsible canine guardianship that the paper proposes you would most certainly own your dog. However, we encourage the adoption of the term 'guardianship' because it implies a further level of requisite care to owning that dog. It implies a level of care beyond having a possession — a thinking, feeling, sentient possession.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I get all that. Just don't tell her that I don't own her anymore; she might want to go and do her own thing.

The CHAIR — Very good. Any final questions? If not, at this point, Mr Griggs, I thank you very much for your presentation and for answering our questions today.

Mr GRIGGS — Thank you.

The CHAIR — I just remind you that you will receive your copy of the transcript in the next few weeks for proofreading, and those transcripts will ultimately find their way onto the committee's website. Once again, thank you for appearing before us today.

Mr GRIGGS — Thank you for giving me the opportunity.

Committee adjourned.