



Petshop puppies probe

THE sale of puppies in pet shops will be examined under a crackdown on puppy farming.

Tasmania's Animal Welfare Advisory Committee has been directed to look into the sale of dogs through pet shops as part of a broader investigation into the puppy-farming and puppy-selling industry.

Earlier this week, animal welfare advocates lobbied the State Government to introduce legislation to regulate puppy farming as a way of squeezing out unethical backyard dog breeders.

Both the Dogs' Home of Tasmania and RSPCA said a mandatory licensing system and a restriction on how many puppies could be bred per breeder would help address over-breeding, in-breeding, inherited health conditions and abandonment issues.

Yesterday, Primary Industries Minister Bryan Green asked the AWAC to consider the issue at its board meeting next month.

Mr Green said he would consider the committee's advice before he made any decision about regulating either dog breeding or sales, or both.

The RSPCA said there were many reputable pedigree dog breeders in the industry but the way dogs are bred needed to change.

At some puppy farms, breeding animals are never allowed out of their cage to exercise, socialise or to urinate or defecate.

The most recent puppy farm cases the RSPCA has investigated involved those breeding poodles and chihuahuas.

One of Australia's worst puppy farming cases, which cost the RSPCA more than \$1million in vet treatment, food, boarding, medication and legal bills, involved the seizure of more than 100 poodles from a puppy farm south of Brisbane in 2008.

The dogs were found in filthy conditions, with their hair matted with faeces and urine, and most were living in milk crates.

The RSPCA said puppies born on farms often had long-term health and/or behavioral problems because of the conditions in which they were bred, poor maternal nutrition and a lack of adequate socialisation during the crucial first few weeks of life.

Inherited conditions can include retinal atrophy, hip dysplasia and corneal dystrophy.

Ultimately, the RSPCA wants to see puppy farming banned in Tasmania and across Australia through the establishment of a national register to permanently trace a dog to a breeder and all subsequent owners.

It wants enforceable animal welfare legislation introduced which is supported by compulsory minimum standards for both the breeding and sale of dogs.

The RSPCA also wants export provisions for the sale of puppies overseas to be strengthened and for Centrelink and the tax office to be aware of dog breeding as an income-generator.

A dog lover, who watched the puppy she bought from a pet shop die slowly from hereditary kidney disease, has also added her voice to the debate.

Former Hobart woman Rebecca, who did not want to use her last name, bought a \$650 shitzu-poodle cross last year.

She expected her new “fur child” to be her companion for a decade or more.

Instead, the dog lover was forced to put Charlie, down at the age of just five months after he suffered acute renal failure, which her vet said was because of hereditary kidney disease.

Rebecca said she had not taken the decision to get a dog lightly.

“You believe after making the decision to commit to having a dog that you are making a lifetime investment,” she said.

RSPCA Tasmania president Brett Steele said irresponsible breeding could result in an increased rate of inheritable disorders through lack of genetic diversity.

He said people should not buy a puppy from a pet shop or through the internet or newspaper advertisement without being able to visit its home to check out the conditions in which it was bred.

Mr Steele said the health issues associated with dogs from puppy farms relate more to the breeding rather than the breed of dog.

“But we have done an analysis on our pet insurance statistics and have found that owners of purebred dogs on average spend more time and money at the vet than owners of your average mixed breed,” Mr Steele said.

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