

Compulsory muzzling of pet greyhounds in Australia

Background

In all States/Territories of Australia, except the Northern Territory and some local council areas in Queensland, there is a compulsory requirement for pet greyhounds to wear a muzzle in public.

Compulsory greyhound muzzling requirements are contained within the relevant domestic animal acts and regulations and/or local laws.

In New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, programs exist that can assess pet greyhounds for suitability to be exempted from wearing a muzzle in public. For example, green collar programs such as the NSW Greenhounds initiative whereby greyhounds that have passed the program can wear a green collar in public, instead of a muzzle. In Tasmania there is no muzzle exemption program available.

Relevant RSPCA policy

Current compulsory greyhound muzzling laws are based on 'breed' not on individual dog behaviour and are an example of breed-specific legislation (BSL). There is no evidence to show that greyhounds as a breed pose any greater risk to the public compared to other dog breeds or mix of breeds. Compulsory greyhound muzzling is contrary to current RSPCA policy regarding muzzling which states that the use of muzzles should be based on the behaviour of each individual dog (see RSPCA policy A7 below).

Current greyhound muzzling laws are also contrary to RSPCA policy A8 (see below) which states that RSPCA Australia does not support dog management legislation that discriminates against specific types or breeds of dogs. Each individual dog should be assessed based on their behaviour.

The RSPCA supports the complete removal of compulsory muzzling requirements for pet greyhounds while in a public place.

Animal welfare impact of compulsory muzzling

Current greyhound muzzling requirements contribute to negative public misperceptions about greyhound temperaments and their suitability as pets. Many members of the public are not aware that compulsory muzzling requirements are in place and therefore many people mistakenly conclude that greyhounds are muzzled due to an aggressive and dangerous temperament. In reality, greyhounds generally have friendly and gentle dispositions. Unfortunately this misperception has major ramifications on greyhound rehoming.

Greyhounds that do not require a muzzle for safety reasons should be able to travel in public unmuzzled. This would assist in improving the image of greyhounds as suitable pets and contribute to an increase in rehoming rates. This is a critical issue as current rehoming rates for greyhounds that are discarded by the greyhound racing industry are very low.

International laws

Compulsory muzzling of pet greyhounds in public occurs only in Australia and Northern Ireland.

RSPCA Australia has not identified any evidence of increased safety risks or incidents/issues arising from the absence of compulsory muzzling of pet greyhounds in public places in other countries.

RSPCA Policy A07 Companion animal management

7.5.6 Muzzles

- 7.5.6.1 RSPCA Australia believes that muzzles should not be used as a routine management procedure as they restrict dogs' natural behaviour and serve no practical purpose for the majority of dogs.
- 7.5.6.2 The use of muzzles should be based on the behaviour of each individual dog. Where muzzling devices are used, they must:
- only be worn for short periods of time where the dog is under constant supervision
 - be properly fitted to ensure they do not cause injury, pain or distress
 - allow the dog to undertake normal activities such as panting and drinking (the only exception is muzzles used for veterinary clinical examinations).

RSPCA Policy A08 Dog management

8.5 Dangerous dogs

- 8.5.1 RSPCA Australia considers that any dog of any size, breed or mix of breeds may be dangerous and thus dogs should not be declared dangerous on the basis of breed or appearance. Each individual dog should be assessed based on their behaviour.
- 8.5.2 RSPCA Australia does not support dog management legislation that discriminates against specific types or breeds of dogs.