

S00140 – Alex Chapman

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the proposed wildlife licensing changes in New South Wales.

The current licensing system has provided a structured and easy-to-navigate system to own native reptiles in New South Wales.

In my experience, the advice given by pet shops (in particular) to new owners of the species is awful. I have experienced and rescued numerous Bearded Dragons which have metabolic bone diseases (MBD), adenovirus and significant parasites, all due to the owner's negligence or lack of knowledge in owning the species.

While the basic needs of these animals is quite easy to understand, the advice given to new owners is often detrimental – both in the short term and long term. We must understand that pet shops are a commercial operation and often selling to owners that would not know that the products and advice given to them by the pet shop eventually caused the harm listed above to their animals.

I am genuinely shocked that owners and keepers will be only subject to the Code of Practice if these reforms are accepted. Regardless, while reporting abuse and neglect is not acted upon at the current time, the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) needs to undertake stricter inspections and enforcement of the code.

I make the following recommendations:

1. OEH establish a panel of experts for each type of breed (for example, Pogona) to provide ongoing review and recommendations to OEH as to requirements of ownership and regulation recommendations to pet stores and other commercial operations.
2. The current system (a companion license required for one Pogona Vitticeps) continues, with an R1 license required for multiple animals kept by the license holder.
3. OEH undertakes a significant audit of pet stores and educate these stores as to the appropriate care required for this species, in particular tight review of 'Lifetime Kits' given to new owners.
4. OEH undertake regular and random inspections of license holders, no matter the level of license they hold or the activity which occurs under that license.
5. OEH consult closely with breeders and experts in reptile keeping to develop fact sheets and publicly-available information for new owners. I would be happy to hear from OEH on this subject and keen to contribute.

In summary, I believe the proposed changes to licensing will be detrimental to Pogona Vitticeps as a species in New South Wales and will result in unethical breeding, the sale of unhealthy animals and an increase in abusive/neglectful keeping arrangements. It is not just about licensing – OEH has failed to consult with industry on an ongoing basis and I firmly request the establishment of Panels of Experts (keepers, veterinarians, welfare groups) to continue to advise OEH on the licensing and keeping of native animals.