

Moderation of the Anti Discrimination commission law

Question 9

Should the Act be broadened to include specifically trained assistance animals such as therapeutic and psychiatric seizure alert animals?

I have a severe to a profound hearing loss and have been assisted by hearing dogs trained by the Australian Lions Hearing Dogs for over 25 years and thanks for the opportunity to write about the proposed change to the Anti-Discrimination Laws in the NT specifically to Question 9: "Should the Act be broadened to include specifically trained assistance animals such as therapeutic and psychiatric seizure animals?" My recommendation is from my personal experience as a hearing dog owner and discussions, I had with many assistance dogs owners including hearing dogs.

I would like first to directly answer the question "... be broadened to include specifically trained assistance animals such as therapeutic and psychiatric seizure animals".

- yes - however, we needs to restrict the definition of animals to dogs only! The definition of animals is too broad and could include cats, horse, rat and crocodile!
- and yes it should be broadened to include specifically trained assistance animals such as therapeutic and psychiatric seizure animals.

For further discussion I will be referring animals as dogs as I believe the law should be defined as dogs only.

I believe there should a number of conditions that should be met before a dog can be recognised under the new Anti-Discrimination laws of NT. Currently there are no form of recognition for assistance dogs in the NT, and this I feel is urgently needed. These laws should also allow provision for assistance dogs under training.

There are a number of reasons why I believe we should be improving the Anti-discrimination laws in relation to assistance dogs for this:

1. currently under the Anti-discrimination Law of the NT. Section 21 says

Guide dog means a dog that is trained to provide assistance to a person who has a visual, hearing or mobility impairment

Under the currently law there is no form of recognition of how to recognise a dogs that have been trained to support the visually impaired, hearing impaired nor mobility impaired. This is badly needed. The reasons are stated below.

- there had been some cases that I am aware of both in the NT and interstate where people had claimed their dog to be an assistance dog when they have undergone no training and they had brought an service dogs kit from the internet and using the kit, taken their "assistance dog" into public places.
- There is a lack of awareness in the community of the recognition of assistance dogs and how they can be identified.

- 46
- there is an increasing number of organisations that are training assistance dogs and owner trainers. Currently there are no way of recognising who are generous trainers and who are not.
 - As there are so many people and organisations who are training their own dogs. There are no territory/nationwide identification to identify which assistance dogs and/or handlers are generous. It is up to the individual organisations/owner trainers to organise. I believe there should be an unified identification for all assistance dogs, both trained by organisations and owner trained.
 - introduce a management board which will specifically monitor issues with assistance dogs. This include the registration of Assistance Dogs in the NT. Queensland, South Australia and West Australia have already have those bodies incorporated in their states. By having an Territory wide identification system it will make it easier for assistance dogs handlers to have access to public places just as much as stopping fake assistance dogs.

If a board is established they should have to power to register and recognise all assistance dogs provided the meet the criteria:

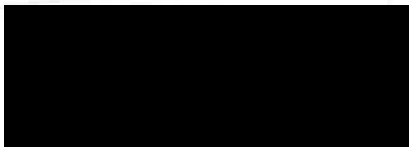
- pass a PAT (Public Access Test) on a biannual case. This is a basic standard that many organisations including Guide Dogs, Australian Lions Hearing Dogs assess their dogs to make sure that they are safe to their owners and can behave in an appropriate manner in the community. This is a international standard set by the Assistance Dogs International and the International Guide Dogs Federation which all members organisations must abide.
- To pass a PAT test the assistance dogs needs to be safe and effective in a public place or vehicles
 - is able to be handled by the handler with or without the support of an alternative handler, to be:-
 1. Non-aggressive behaviour
 2. Well-managed:
 3. Public places/public passenger vehicles:
 4. People response:
 5. Dog distraction:
 6. Noise distraction:
 7. Walk to heel:
 8. Toileting/Hygiene Behaviour:
 9. Acceptable toileting

The PAT assessments should be conducted by approved organisations such as Australian Lions Hearing Dogs or Guide Dogs for the Blind or approved trainers/assessors.

- Assistance dogs to be recognised as an assistance dogs :-
 - Should have some form of task they have to undergo

- handlers should have a medical assistance and be determined by a medical specialist that the person would benefit from having an assistance dog.
- are not classified as dangerous dog.
- identified as an assistance dog should be registered under the NT laws and issued with a government identification card with a photo of the dog and their handlers and be recognised Australia wide
- as well as passing a PAT test.
- those above assessment should be checked on a regular basis, maybe bi-annually.

If an identification system is developed to work with the Queensland, South Australian and Western Australian to make sure that their and the NT recognised dogs are recognised under their states/territory laws. The owners of dogs from other states will/should be recognised under the Federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity laws. I would expect that the laws in other states will in the next few years be improved.



Soos