

Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
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Dear Committee members,

I am writing this letter to you to ask for your parliamentary help in trying to get the Pet Food Industry of Australia legally regulated. I wish to explain to you my reasons of doing so by relaying to you the story of my recent experiences with mouldy Applaws brand dry dog food.

On the 20th of April 2018, I purchased a 2.7 kg bag of Applaws Duck and Venison dry dog food from Woolworths, The Stables Shopping Centre, GOLDEN GROVE, SA 5125 to feed my dog. I had never used this brand of dog food before.. This bag had a best before date (BB) of 13/5/19 . I took the bag home and opened it to immediately find that the entire food contents were covered in a whitish mould. I was extremely shocked to find this given that 'voluntary' recalls were already occurring with another brand of dog food that were leading to deaths and disability from megaoesophagus (ME). One of my friend's dogs had to be euthanased because it developed ME from eating Advance Dermocare food. . I then took the bag of Applaws food back to the store and spoke with the store manager about it. I was greatly concerned that there might be a problem with the food itself as the packaging looked in very good condition with no breaks in the seals etc, The store manager then retrieved another bag with the same BB date as mine and opened it to find that there was mould all the way through that one as well. I lodged an incident report with Woolworths and became suspicious that this could be a widespread problem.

I then contacted the Applaws company via their Facebook page and also via phone. I advised them of my findings and eventually the General Manager (unfortunately I didnt write down his name) rang me from the UK where he is based and said they were taking this report 'seriously' He stated that there was a production line problem - that the food hadnt been dried sufficiently enough, that they were moving to new premises and including new quality control procedures (including an extra drying step) in order to prevent this from re-

occurring. He said that because of the time of the year that the food had been processed, it was warm in temperature so any excess moisture remaining in the food would have contributed to the mould growth. He said that they had 'quarantined' batches at the factory - removing any of this affected batch at the factory location - including extra batches either side of that production run. I asked if there was going to be a public recall on this food by requesting it to be pulled from the shelves of retail shops to stop its sale and protect consumers who were unaware of this issue , and he replied that this incident appeared to be '*isolated*', that the mould on the food '*shouldnt pose a risk*' to pet health - '*that a dog's digestion is much stronger than a humans*' etc etc. He stated that the mould may make the

food more unpalatable and if customers found this in their purchased food then the Applaws company were happy to refund/replace the food but **NO RECALL**. It should be noted that this food could still be sitting on shelves anywhere in Australia available for sale till May next year (2019). Given the high level of contamination that I found in the food I bought at that time – I am extremely concerned at what state it will be in by its BB date!

I decided to do a bit more investigation as I was very unhappy and dissatisfied with this response. I then posted online about my findings with this mouldy food and asked if anyone else had had the same experience. One of the groups <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SpoodleOwners/> - who has over 5,700 members Australia wide started replying back to my post and several members from this group alone throughout Australia e.g. WA, SA, VIC, NSW, ACT reported having the same issue. They supplied photos of the food and bag details. There were reports of other batches and different flavour lines (e.g. chicken and turkey) and both instore and online purchases from different companies being involved. I encouraged them all to feedback their experiences to the Applaws company directly so the company could be made directly aware. A few people stated to me that they had already fed this food to their dogs before realising it was mouldy and their dogs had become unwell with diarrhoea and/or vomiting. **A common theme was that people had often mistakenly thought they were somehow responsible for the mould – because they had not considered that the food itself may have been already contaminated and as such that they had disposed of it without making a report back to the place of purchase or the company itself.** One person had stated her dog had been sick for over a week and needed veterinary treatment with antibiotics for fever and infection. **The Applaws General Manager stated that the testing they had done on the mould showed that it wasn't harmful to a dog's health – yet they have since paid this owner's vet bills!!**

I then posted a warning on the Pet Food Reviews – Australia FB page <https://www.facebook.com/PetFoodReviewsAustralia/about> the Applaws brand dry dog food. Even more people reported finding mould in the Applaws dry dog food varieties. I was then subsequently contacted by Angelique Donnellan of the ABC 7.30 report who then interviewed me regarding this and the story was then put to air 16th May 2018 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-16/plastic-mould-in-dog-food-prompts-call-for-industry-regulation/9764318>

I have tried **repeatedly** to contact the Pet Food Industry Association of Australia in May 2018 – but the phone number (8383 9386) they have listed on their web page <https://www.pfiaa.com.au/ContactDetails/ContactPFIAA.aspx> is 'disconnected'. They have no social media presence. I have sent two emails marked 'URGENT' to them using their 'Contact PFIAA' page – but have received no response whatsoever. It appears that they are not interested in liaising with the public even when major food contamination issues are raised with them.

I was contacted by a person who stated that they had become ill upon being exposed to the mouldy Applaws food in addition to her dog becoming ill from eating it.. This person stated that they are highly allergic to mould and she noticed that, she would suddenly develop allergy symptoms at her dog's feed time. She stated that she noticed even

her own dog had started refusing this food and the food had an offensive odour to it so she threw it out. Again, she hadn't realised at the time that the food was mouldy until part way through feeding the bag to her dog.

It is a very important and perhaps not previously considered issue that **this mouldy contaminated food has the potential risk to cause REAL harm to HUMAN health in addition to pet health.** My own daughter is being treated with immunosuppressant medications for a chronic and debilitating illness and as such has a compromised immune system. She needs to be particularly vigilant around exposure to pathogens such as moulds as they have the potential to infect and overtake her immune system. I opened this bag of mouldy food up in my home environment which has potentially exposed her to a greater than normal risk of developing serious health issues from these unknown pathogens in the food. . Particularly for people who have impaired immune systems – exposure to moulds can lead to serious health conditions and even death.

I have tried to look up what the AS 5812: 2017 Manufacturing and marketing of pet food standard is in order to see what the standards cover – but they are not freely publicly available. People need to pay \$128.19 for a copy of the 26 page document . This in itself is a major obstacle to the public consumer. How can people comment on these standards when they have to first pay a large amount of money before they can even see it.??? And what is the point of having a 'standards' system when it is purely voluntary such that if there is a problem then there is no obligation or penalty is given when they are breached??

Its an awful thing to say but I consider myself 'lucky' that I spotted the mould in my dog food before I fed it to him. Those owners who fed Dermocare to their dogs were not as 'lucky' as I was – they had NO warning or indication that there was anything wrong with the food and they had to wait months before it was recalled. We need independent compliance regulation and proper food standards in place that hold manufacturers accountable and responsible because this self serving nature of the industry is hurting innocent consumers.

I am able to provide photos and a sample of the Applaws dry dog food for your examination if you so require.

I am calling on you to please help tidy up this industry. There are currently no legal requirements for manufacturers to comply with or adhere to any quality control standards whatsoever. It is all voluntary, so there is nothing to stop them from continuing to sell potentially hazardous products as these which they are doing by leaving them on the shelves still for sale and just leaving it up to the consumer to take the risk. This behaviour and practice would not be tolerated if it were human food and for many of us – our pets are members of our family and deserve the respect to be fed food that is at the very least SAFE. Pets are one of the most vulnerable groups there are – they are COMPLETELY dependent upon what we feed them for their health. I don't want my dog or cat to become ill, disabled or die because of the food I feed them like others needlessly have, but with the current

situation all our pets are at risk . Many pet owners including myself have stated that they feel very frightened and unsure about choosing food to feed their pets. This is unacceptable and needs changing. Please help me and other pet owners to change this situation for the better .

Thank you for your interest and patience in reading my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Quick