

19 July 2018

Senate Standing Committees of Rural & Regional Affairs & Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Attention: Committee Secretary

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Regulatory approaches to ensure the safety of pet food

Summary

We believe our cat's life-threatening diabetes was caused by the high-grain content of the vet-recommended, dry pet food that we innocently fed him, due to the prevailing misinformation available to pet owners. Since his diagnosis in 2012, after changing his diet to a more natural, traditional diet of raw meaty bones he is disease-free, medication-free, and far healthier than previously.

We recommend a complete overhaul of the pet food industry, or at the very least, an independent body is required to regulate and oversee pet food standards.

Background

In October 2010 we adopted our gorgeous cat, "George," from Katoomba RSPCA, and before leaving the store we purchased the food they recommended - Hills Science Diet dry and tinned cat food. Because it was an expensive, "reputable" name brand highly recommended by vets, we didn't think twice about checking the ingredients or doing some research on it. It was also extremely convenient, and we thought we were feeding him one of the best products available. We included some tinned wet foods in our cat's diet, but found he didn't do very well on it, often vomiting it back up again, so we dropped it out almost altogether, and he was fed practically exclusively on Hills Science Diet dry food.

Our cat seemed to be in relatively good health, except for a mucus-like discharge from one or both eyes, which would never seem to clear up. We were a little surprised by how much water he drank, but didn't question it too much. Although we may have brought it up at a vet visit, we were however reassured enough not to worry. His faeces were also quite loose, unformed stool, but not exactly diarrhoea, and were extremely smelly. With the type of litter tray we used, it was obvious that he passed a lot of wee as well. Sadly, we did not realise these were symptoms of worsening health until early August 2012.

On 5/08/2012 we took him to the vet as he was urinating blood. Tests were completed by the vet, and medications prescribed. Royal Canin Feline Sensitive Sachets were also recommended to us, so we started feeding our cat with those. On Friday 31/08/2012 our cat was now urinating uncontrollably all over the house (he was incontinent), was drinking water constantly, and was clearly extremely unwell. We immediately took him to our local vet again, where urine and blood tests were completed, indicating that his blood glucose levels were dangerously high. He was diagnosed with diabetes mellitus. Surprisingly enough, we were told by the vet that our cat's illness was completely unrelated to his diet. We were told the only effective treatment was insulin injections, at an estimated cost of \$350.00 initial treatment, ongoing \$82 per bottle, which could last about 10 weeks, depending on dose, in addition to needle costs for each injection. The vet told us that without treatment our cat will become keto acidotic (ie, severe life-threatening condition requiring immediate treatment). We advised the vet that we would think about it over the weekend and return on Monday.

Fortunately for us and our cat, on Sunday we miraculously read an article in the Sunday Telegraph, 2/09/2012, pages 36-37 by Jane Hansen, titled "Growth Industry" highlighting the fact that pets are big business, and discussing the high costs involved with pet ownership, particularly when they become seriously ill. The article quoted Dr Richard Malik, a Sydney University lecturer who ran a vet practice in Double Bay at the time of article printing. The article stated that Dr Malik blames many of the diseases he treats in cats and dogs, on their diet, and he is quoted as saying "The great enemy of cats is dried cat food, it has way too much carbohydrate and now we see cats with diabetes and periodontal disease, a whole range of conditions due to being too fat."

Wow, light-bulb moment for us – of course excess grains in our cat's dry food could be linked to his high glucose levels causing diabetes. It made perfect sense. The article went on to mention vet Dr Tom Lonsdale, his clinic in Windsor, and his book "Raw Meaty Bones." Convinced we were onto something here, on Monday 3/09/2012 we took our cat to see Dr Lonsdale at his clinic, only 15 minutes' drive from where we lived. Tom suggested we try tablets first, rather than insulin, and prescribed a new diet - yes, raw meaty bones! We went home armed with medication, raw meat, and lots of information. Following Dr Tom's instructions, from Tuesday 4/09/2012, to Sunday 9/09/2012 we documented our cat's water intake – it had already halved in less than 7 days! We continued with the medication and the new diet, mainly raw frozen quail, rabbit and chicken. We never started insulin injection treatment as prescribed by our previous vet.

In the last 6 years since being on a raw meaty bone diet, our cat has become completely symptom-free from his diabetes, his eye discharge completely cleared up, his fur coat is much healthier, shiny and attractive, his faeces are well-formed and not nearly as smelly, and at nearly 11 years old he is still as playful as a kitten. He is no longer on any medication whatsoever, and is at an ideal weight.

It has become clear to us that the Australian pet food industry is "educating" or indoctrinating veterinary students on the apparent benefits of commercially produced dry pet foods, providing benefits to vet clinics who promote their products, and ignoring the field research of genuine vets who have seen time and time again the detrimental effects of feeding cats and dogs on a diet high in grains, and the real value of going back to the traditional diet of felines and canines in the wild – raw meat and bones. This is especially important for cats, as felines are known to be "obligate carnivores". Clearly the pet food industry is far more concerned with profits than the health of our pets, and needs a complete overhaul, or at the very least, requires an independent body to regulate pet food standards.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Concerned Pet Owner