

Senate Enquiry

Submission for

Regulatory Approaches to Ensure the Safety of Pet Food.

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

From

Mr & Mrs Mileham

Owner of a pet
Consumer & purchaser of Pet food

Overview

**As the owner of a dog, our beloved pet,
affected by the Advance, Democare,
Megaesophagus horrific disease.**

Like many consumers we had purchased the Mars Advance dog food for many years believing that it was the best we could buy. Unfortunately in the world we live in value is often associated with price and the price of this premium dog food was \$145 per bag. Little did we know that the Pet Food Industry was not regulated and any issues were therefore left in the hands of the industry manufacturer, supplier to issue a recall once a problem was reported if they so wished.

Unfortunately it was the delay in reporting or issuing a recall that ultimately led to our dog being hit with this disease. According to media reports the manufacturer became aware of the possible links between Megaesophagus and their dog food brand Advance Dermocare as early as November 2017. At the very least once 10 Police Dogs in Victoria were hit with this disease in December 2017 the connection could not be denied. Still we were not made aware of this link until a media release reported this on Saturday 24th March 2018. Had this process been expedited it may have saved our pet and possible many others. One can't help but think that if it had not been for the police dogs and the fact that this RARE disease became a news issue, we may never have been told.

Not only were our pets put in danger of a deadly disease, we as owners were often still feeding the contaminated food thinking we were doing the best for our pets. Not only were we as owners in the dark as to the cause of this disease but many veterinarians were caught off guard as this had previously been a rare disease. This in itself could have led to many misdiagnoses and the possibility of more affected pets as many veterinarians advised to euthanase these dogs due to a poor long term prognosis.

Personally we paid to have our dog fully diagnosed as we could not believe such a brutal diagnosis to a previously happy and healthy pet, this meant many vet bills and pathology tests going to California for testing at a hefty sum. This like many other owners was a no brainer as we tried to make sense of this disastrous situation.

As a simple lay person, pet owner who is not compliant with either the senate or industry terminology I intend to address this enquiry as that, a lay person. **This is our story**, Rosemarie Cliff (Owners) and BJ (Black Jack) our adorable pet.

For the benefit of this enquiry this is our story and as such all of the below terms of reference are all relevant. I have not separated these, rather have tried to reflect on them within our story.

Terms of Reference to be addressed.

- 1. The uptake, compliance and efficacy of the *Australian Standards for the Manufacturing & Marketing of Pet Food (AS5812:2017)***
- 2. The Labelling and nutritional requirements for domestically manufactured pet food.**
- 3. The management, efficacy and promotion of the AVA-PFIAA administered PetFAST.**
- 4. The feasibility of an independent body to regulate pet food standards, or an extension of FSANZ's remit.**
- 5. The Voluntary and/or mandatory recall frame work of pet food products.**
- 6. The interaction of state, territory and federal legislation;**
- 7. Comparisons with international approaches to the regulation of pet food; and**
- 8. Any other related matters**

I can see that the previous enquire *Managing the Safety of Domestically Produced Pet Meat, and Imported and Domestically Produced Pet Food, 2012*, addressed many issues that were being presented at that time. For example,

- Irradiated foods going through quarantine causing many (Mostly Cats) to die from effected food in 2008.
- Kidney disease and death in dogs associated with a particular imported treats.
- The illness and death of dogs and cats eating food contaminated with sulphite preservatives causing thiamine deficiency.
- Plus, plus, plus..

Not to trivialise the last enquiry, unfortunately the outcome of that enquiry seemed to address those issues and not the overall problems associated with the manufacturing of pet food. Allowing the pet food industry to be self-regulated, is astonishing. A four Billion dollar a year industry was allowed to make their own rules, what other business/industry would have been given this privilege. Imagine a building industry being able to build and create whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted it, would all of our building still be standing?

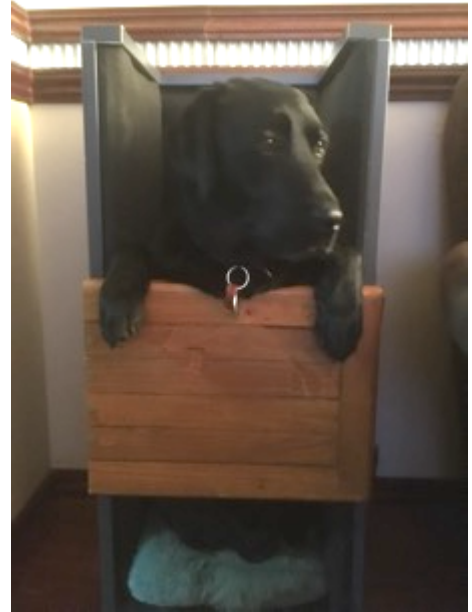
It is perhaps the oversight or generalisation of this previous enquiry that has resulted in this current megaesophagus outbreak. Whatever the case, megaesophagus is not the only problem that has plagues the Pet food industry in resent years. Other contaminations have also occurred, plastic and or metal found in foods with the manufacturer not calling a recall. It is only now with the publicity surrounding this current situation that other pet owners have come out with their problems. Problems that will no doubt be presented to this senate enquiry by those people with personal feelings and experience.

As an Australian consumer I / we the general public need to have confidence in the way our country, Governments are protecting us. Not only us personally but everything we do and everything we purchase. Living in a first world country leads one to expect that everything out there is covered by come sort of consumer protective law or another, that only appropriate items are imported or produced here in this great country.

Black Jacks story (BJ).

BJ is our adorable black Labrador, he has hardly ever been sick in his six and a half years and has the most amazing nature.

In January BJ started to be sick we thought, actually he was regurgitating. Over the next week this increased so we took him to the vet who gave him antacids thinking he had a simple upset stomach. He finished the medication but he just got worse so we took him back where he was x-rayed. We happily went back to pick up expecting our boy to need a change of medication that would sort out what was happening. To our horror we were either advised to euthanase due to this disease having a poor prognosis or try to manage it. We just could not understand, so we made an appointment with the Murdoch Veterinary Hospital here in WA.



They were amazing and away went all his test to Melbourne, Sydney and California. All we wanted was a chance at a remission, this could not be happening. We needed a miracle but again the vets at the hospital suggested that euthanasia might be necessary as a quality life could not be assured.

Again we could not accept this, now early February and still no word about any food contamination, not even through Murdoch our highest veterinary hospital in this state. So we searched and searched, the vets had to be wrong. The internet became our friend, we had to find a solution, I became obsessed. This disastrous disease had taken over our life.

Once the recall was announced at leased we could work out what had happened, it had answered some of our questions. We still did not like it and our first reaction was anger, but we could stop searching.

It was with the internet that we learnt how to care for our poor boy. Our local vet had not had to deal with this disease before so her information was either out of date or incorrect. So the internet sites helped us learn how to cook his food, make his jelly as **these dogs can not even have a drink**. Everything was different. **They can not eat anything** other than the slurry that we meticulously mix up three times a day. Even a crumb dropped by a granddaughter would make him sick. **Nothing stayed the same.**

We have made him a chair, a bed, a collar, all to hold his head up. As his picture shows he now has to sit in a chair upright, Gravity now has to do the job of the esophagus. No longer can he have a simple treat, every time he eats he has to sit in his chair for 30 minutes to let Gravity do its job. This is a horrible and debilitating disease that has Aspirational Pneumonia as the main side effect. It is this side effect that kills most of these dogs.

BJ's care takes about three hours a day now. We know that without dedication and for some owners all the care and dedication could not save their special pet. **So we do everything we can to save our beautiful best friend.**

Some of the sacrifices we have made for our best friend include;

- I take an extra hour away from work each lunch time so I can come home and feed BJ.
- We have almost retired, last year we got our passports and went on our first overseas trip, first and last.
- We now only go where we can take BJ, he has his own spot in the caravan.
- Every day we make a tray of Jelly up instead of drinking. At least the jelly blocks roll down his esophagus while he sits upright and he is not sick. Water is apparently one of the major causes of Aspirational Pneumonia.
- We soak his food in water to be assured of his hydration and we add flaked potato to this to make a porridge consistency adding pure honey. We can't forget he depends on us.
- If we are sick we still have to do what is needed, no one else can care for him it takes too long each day to expect anyone else to take over.
- So far we have been able to maintain his daily routine ourselves. If one of us became sick and or hospitalised we may have to take him to the vets for care. We would have to make sure that they know his routine as the wrong care could mean Aspirational Pneumonia and possible death.

We gladly do what ever we have to for our boy. He is not just a dog to us he is apart of our family. Saying this the pet food industry needs to become accountable and there needs to be **regulations that ensure;**

- **Early mandatory Reporting for a recall.** How many dogs may have been saved if a better system was in place.
- **Labelling that highlights not just that they use imported ingredients,** also where the ingredients come from with a % of the compound stated.
- **A regulatory body** that is not sponsored by the pet food industry and has some sort of **power to enforce the code of conduct** without any conflict of interest.
- The **pet food Australian Standards** is currently **VOLUNTARY AS5812:2017** which means they do not have to follow it. If there were legislated laws they would have to follow them.
- Everybody has rules, in our day to day lives we all have to follow laws and rules. Even school children have rules to follow. **We now need the pet food industry to also HAVE to follow a new set of rules.**
- **Our pets are not just animals** and even if they were **JUST** an animal don't they deserve some respect.
- **WE ALL DESERVE SOME RESPECT, REPECT AND ACCOUNTABILITY FROM THOSE WHO WE TRUSTED.**
- We now need to **force accountability with regulations.** As consumers we need to have confidence in knowing that a quality product is just that a quality Product.
- **Personally without regulations to assure our Pet Food Industry is now safe I cannot buy Australian Made until it is.**
- **They say they don't know what has caused this, so how do we know the same thing is not happening over and over and would they tell us.**
- **Those Police dogs open a can of worms, without them we would still be in the dark.**

Unfortunately our world is powered by money, we have to stand up to this for all future injustices, not just in the Pet Food Industry.

We are one of the lucky ones our dog is still alive and we are fighting to help him stay that way.