



VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS BOARD  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

## **Bark Reduction Policy**

### **Background**

This Policy aims to protect the welfare of dogs from indiscriminate surgical bark reduction (debarking) and to encourage considerate management of dogs.

This Policy recognises that bark reduction may be necessary for therapeutic or prophylactic effects or as an alternative to euthanasia for a dog that barks persistently. This Policy does not approve of bark reduction as a substitute for proper care, management and training of a dog.

The owner of the dog must recognise that persistent barking is a behaviour problem, and the cause of the problem will not be addressed by this surgical procedure. The Policy recognises that barking is a natural behaviour in dogs given they are social animals that use barking as a means of communication.

Dog owners are encouraged to seek professional help to address the cause of the problem. When management changes and training are undertaken, sufficient time must always be allowed for behaviour changes in a dog to be evident.

### Meaning of nuisance or excessive barking

For the purposes of this Policy "Nuisance or excessive barking" refers to barking or howling that is persistent or continues to such a degree or extent that it unreasonably interferes with the peace, comfort or convenience of any person in premises other than the premises at which the dog is ordinarily kept. Nuisance, for barking, means interference with the reasonable comfort, peace or privacy of anyone.

### Meaning of bark reduction (or debarking)

For the purposes of this Policy, 'bark reduction' or 'debarking' means the surgical operation performed by a registered veterinary surgeon to reduce the noise of a dog's bark. When a dog is bark-reduced, its ability to communicate with other animals and humans is reduced. Most bark-reduced dogs have a subdued "husky" bark, audible up to 20 metres.

## **Undergoing bark reduction in the ACT**

### Circumstances in which a dog may undergo bark reduction in the ACT

The dog must be at least 12 months of age. Relevant evidence is required to show the dog is not less than 12 months of age.

The owner must demonstrate that they have taken all reasonable steps to discourage the dog from barking by considerate care, training and management of the dog. This will include such measures as:

- a) appropriate obedience training by a recognised body;
- b) consultation with an animal behaviourist and/or veterinary behaviourist; and
- c) use of humane bark reduction aids.

The onus is on the owner to demonstrate to a registered veterinary surgeon that:

- a) the problem has been ongoing for a significant period;
- b) consistent, ongoing and genuine attempts have been made to appropriately address the cause of the problem; and
- c) a range of options has been tried.

The owner must also demonstrate that there have been:

- a) written complaints from two or more neighbouring residences that have been submitted to ACT Domestic Animal Services (DAS) and an authorised officer of DAS has investigated the complaints and has confirmed that reasonable efforts have failed to discourage the dog from excessively barking;
- b) training and management options have been pursued by the owner; and
- c) it is the opinion of a registered veterinarian that all other avenues have been pursued and bark reduction is a last resort to removal of the dog or euthanasia.

## **Responsibilities of the owner**

### Responsibilities of the owner in the case of a dog which barks excessively

An owner who intends to have a dog bark reduced must first complete the attached Statutory Declaration declaring that the dog is a “public nuisance” and demonstrate that they have taken reasonable steps to reduce the problem, as outlined in this Code. The declaration is titled “Owner statutory declaration for bark reduction in a dog which is a public nuisance.”

The owner must submit this statutory declaration for signing by the registered veterinary surgeon who intends to perform the bark reduction surgical procedure.

### Responsibilities of the veterinary surgeon

Before agreeing to perform a bark reduction surgical procedure, the registered veterinary surgeon must ensure all of the following:

- a) the dog is at least 12 months of age;
- b) must consider the history and physical condition of the dog;
- c) appropriate arrangements for post-operative care and management are made;
- d) if the welfare of a dog after bark reduction surgery may be jeopardised because it is not able to attract attention to discomfort or danger, the dog should not undergo the bark reduction surgery;
- e) if it is in the veterinary surgeon's professional judgement that bark reduction is inappropriate in a specific case, the owner must be encouraged to arrange behaviour/environmental modification, rehoming or euthanasia of the dog; and
- f) sign the statutory declaration (Attachment A): “Owner statutory declaration for bark reduction in a dog which is a public nuisance.”

The veterinary surgeon should advise owners of dogs who request bark reduction surgery of the possible complications of this procedure. The registered veterinary practitioner must be certain that the owner of the dog understands the risks and limitations of the procedure before accepting the case.

A veterinary surgeon who has surgically reduced the bark of a dog is required to maintain records of the surgical procedure for a period of seven years and be prepared to supply information to the ACT Veterinary Surgeons Board on request.

The veterinary surgeon must advise the owner or the person-in-charge of the appropriate care and management of a dog that has been bark-reduced. It may not be necessary to separate a bark-reduced dog from other dogs, but care must always be taken soon after the operation or with dogs that are unfamiliar to the bark-reduced dog.

**Attachment A: Statutory Declaration**

**OWNERS STATUTORY DECLARATION FOR BARK REDUCTION IN A DOG THAT IS A PUBLIC NUISANCE**

To be completed in full and presented to the Veterinary Surgeon who it is intended will surgically bark- reduce (debark) the dog.

All sections are to be completed by relevant parties and the document is to be witnessed by a Justice of the Peace.

I .....  
(FULL NAME)

of .....  
(ADDRESS)

Do solemnly and sincerely declare that:

1) I am the owner of the following dog:

Name of dog: ..... Breed: .....

Age: ..... Sex: ..... Desexed: Yes or No

ACT Dog Registration No: ..... Microchip No: .....

- 2) There have been written complaints from two or more neighbouring residences that:
  - a) have been submitted to ACT Domestic Animal Services (DAS) and training and management options have been pursued by the owner; and
  - b) an authorised officer of DAS has investigated the complaints and has confirmed that reasonable efforts have failed to discourage the dog from excessively barking.
  
- 3) I request that the above dog be surgically bark-reduced (debarked) because it is a “public nuisance” as it barks persistently. I have made every reasonable effort to discourage the dog from so barking by considerate care, obedience training, behaviour and environmental management and the use of humane bark reduction aids. The only remaining effective alternative to bark reducing (debarking) is to euthanase the dog.
  
- 4) I have read the Policy for Bark Reduction of Dogs in the ACT.
  
- 5) I recognise that persistent barking is a behavioural problem frequently caused by anxiety, and that debarking does not reduce the dog’s anxiety because it does not alter the problem, only the symptom. The methods that I have used to attempt to alter the abovementioned dog’s behaviour are as follows (give details for each attempt):

**(I) Obedience classes/training programs used:**

Nature of the attempt: .....

Name of trainer and business name: .....

Contact details of trainer: .....

Year/s attended: .....

Duration of attendance: .....

Devices/methods used: .....

**(II) Animal Behaviourists used:**

Nature of the attempt: .....

Name of behaviourist and business name: .....

Contact details of behaviourist: .....

Year/s attended: .....

Duration of attendance: .....

Devices/methods used: .....

**(III) Behavioural approaches taken in consultation with a veterinary surgeon or animal behaviour expert:**

Nature of the attempt: .....

Name of veterinary behaviourist/expert and business name: .....

Contact details of behaviourist/expert: .....

Year/s attended: .....

Duration of attendance: .....

Devices/methods used: .....

**DECLARATION BY DOG OWNER**

I ..... make this solemn declaration conscientiously and I understand making a false Declaration is punishable by law.

Declared at ..... in the Australian Capital Territory

this ..... day of ..... year .....

DATE ..... SIGNATURE .....

**DECLARATION BY REGISTERED VETERINARY SURGEON**

This dog was submitted to me for bark reduction surgery: .....

Name: ..... Breed: .....

Age: ..... Sex: ..... Desexed: Yes or No

ACT Dog Registration No: ..... Microchip No: .....

Name of Registered Veterinary Surgeon: .....

ACT Veterinary Registration No: .....

Practice Name and Address: .....

.....

**DATE BARK REDUCTION SURGERY WAS PERFORMED**

DATE ..... SIGNATURE .....

DECLARED AND SUBSCRIBED at ..... on ..... of .....

Owners full name: .....

By: .....

This: ..... day of .....

Before me: .....

This: ..... day of .....

Justice of the Peace: (Signature, official stamp & number included):