**DOG CONTROL ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1985**

**Legislative Assembly, 11 September 1985, pages 837-9**

Second reading

**The Hon. D.C. WOTTON (Murray)** obtained leave and introduced a Bill for an Act to amend the Dog Control Act 1979. Read a first time.

The Hon. D.C. WOTTON: I move: That this Bill be now read a second time.

The principal aim of this Bill is to enable a deaf person, including a partially deaf person, accompanied by a hearing dog, to enter property open to or used by the public and vehicles used for the carriage of passengers for hire or reward without incurring penalties or restrictions under any Act.

Most members in this House would be aware of the provisions that are available under the Dog Control Act to enable blind or partially blind people, if travelling on public transport or going into public places, to use a seeing eye dog. I believe very strongly that the same provisions should be available for people who are deaf or partially deaf. The Lions Hearing Dogs Incorporated is an organisation totally funded by the Lions Club of Australia and Papua New Guinea. The project began as— An honourable member: Good work that they do, too.

The Hon. D.C. WOTTON: It is excellent work. The project began in 1982 after a Lions member visiting America saw a demonstration of how dogs could be trained to help their deaf or hearing impaired owners. On his return to Adelaide the project was adopted as a Lions project. The training centre is situated in my electorate at Verdun in the Adelaide Hills and, being the only one, supplies hearing dogs all over Australia. Dogs are trained to alert their owners to ordinary everyday sounds that we take for granted, such as someone knocking at the door. Their dogs are trained to alert the owner to a whistling and boiling kettle, a baby crying, the telephone ringing and, in particular, a smoke alarm. Mrs Appleby: What about people with asthma?

The Hon. D.C. WOTTON: The member for Brighton refers to people who suffer from asthma. I understand that that is the case with these dogs, but I certainly have not—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The honourable member interjecting is not referred to in the Bill and that matter should not be mentioned.

The Hon. D.C. WOTTON: I appreciate that the member for Brighton has an interest in this matter, because, if ever there needed to be a bipartisan situation, this should be it. I think that it is one that all those who have any respect for people who suffer from deafness would recognise and would appreciate the need for the provisions under this legislation. I am told that the dogs investigate the sound, return to their owners, touch them and lead them back to the sound source. I have heard of some remarkable situations and examples of just how effective these dogs are.

The local RSPCA Dog Rescue Home provides these dogs, which are mostly chosen from crossbreed dogs who are friendly and eager to please. They are small to medium in size and between the ages of six to 12 months. On arrival at the centre the dogs are given excellent treatment. They are bathed, given a thorough physical checkup and are fully vaccinated. They are then quarantined for three to four weeks, during which time their training begins, and it is a very extensive training program indeed.

The first sounds taught are door knocking and a smoke alarm. These are compulsory, as everyone receives visitors and we think that every home should be protected against fire. So, all dogs are delivered having been taught about a smoke alarm. Basic obedience is also taught. I am told that the dogs are required merely to walk quietly by the side of the person involved, sit when told to stop, lie down, stay and come when called.

Once a person has applied for a dog a nearby Lions Club is contacted and asked to complete the necessary paperwork. This gives the group a comprehensive picture of the person’s needs and requirements, and it is then able to choose a dog that will suit the individual and their lifestyle. The last few weeks of training is carried out with the needs of the new owner in mind. For example, if the person is non-vocal the training is silent with hand signals only. When the dog is ready for delivery a trainer stays nearby for five days. During this time the recipient and dog learn to work together. By the end of the week the dog has made the transition and is working for its new owner.

The help of three Lions Club members is then requested to visit weekly to help reinforce the training of the dog for a probationary period of three months. Reports are kept and forwarded to the centre concerning the progress of the dog. If, at the end of this time, the dog is well cared for and is working satisfactorily, it becomes accredited. It is interesting to note that there is a formal handing over ceremony of dog to owner. A special orange coloured blaze and lead are presented, which signify to the public that the dog is an accredited hearing dog.

The cost of a hearing dog is approximately $1 500. This covers all veterinary expenses, training and delivery. The recipient bears no part of the cost. Each dog is sponsored by a Lions Club. I am told that to date 52 dogs have been placed with deaf or hearing impaired people throughout Australia. Something like 15 applicants are on the list waiting for the delivery of a dog. Letters are constantly received by the Lions Hearing Dogs Incorporated telling how the dogs have changed their owners’ lives. I am aware of some of those situations.

One such owner is a lady living in Sydney, who has changed from being a person frightened to walk alone on the street to being a person who now travels all over Sydney giving public talks about the organisation and the changes that her hearing dog has made to her life. Another person is no longer the introvert her friends knew. This person now runs a stall at a local trash and treasure market, selling her craft work. The dog goes with her, and sits beside her on a chair. The dog gives her companionship as well as being her ears.

I am aware that mothers of young babies can go about their household duties quite confidently knowing that their dog will alert them if the baby should cry. Deaf and hearing impaired people, with the help of a hearing dog, often regain lost independence. Dogs give elderly people who live alone a reason to go on living, with something to love and care for while also giving them confidence and companionship.

I am aware that recently the Lions Hearing Dogs Incorporated has received a grant from the Government for wages for the next three years. I know that that will help tremendously the work that it is doing. I encourage any member who passes through Verdun and who has a little time to spare to call in and see first hand some of the magnificent work being carried out. I also take this opportunity to record my personal praise and admiration, and I hope the praise and admiration of this Parliament, for the community service so freely given by Lions Clubs throughout Australia. This service is typified by clubs such as the one in my electorate of Hahndorf, where the numbers may not be large but where the spirit of service is very willing. The training centre at Verdun is run by very dedicated staff, who have to be able to communicate with people with specific difficulties.

I am sure that the work they are doing is well appreciated by the community generally. Dogs are trained to respond to sound stimuli that occur in and around a normal home. Although permission has been given for these dogs to accompany their owners on public transport, they cannot go with them into public places. These matters need to be clarified and rectified. Hearing impaired people on holidays suffer tremendously as they are away from a safe, known environment. Take the example of a hearing impaired person staying in a hotel or motel. They have two choices: first, they can inform the desk staff that they are deaf and their door will not be locked—not a good idea these days, I suggest; secondly, they can lock their door but they would not hear a knock to signify breakfast or anyone trying to gain attention for any reason, such as evacuation in case of fire.

 Telephone calls are missed. Many hearing impaired people are able to speak on the telephone, but cannot hear the phone ringing, even if it is in the same room. Mothers in strange houses, such as holiday houses, need to be alerted to babies or youngsters crying. Hearing impaired people staying anywhere other than in their own homes still need to know what is going on around them. They have become used to the security of a dog being their ears.

Hearing dogs are trained to alert their owners to prowlers and intruders—a common occurrence in households where there are deaf people, because burglars always assume that the home is empty. To stay in a strange place is a nerveracking experience for the hard of hearing. Most forms of deafness include head noises to a varying degree. It is hard to tell whether something was really heard or whether the noise was in the head. Stress of any sort aggravates this complaint.

As the hearing dogs are trained to be with their owners virtually for 24 hours a day, working for most of this time, it is extremely stressful for owners and dogs to be separated, because the dog is not permitted to accompany its owner in certain places. Many owners of hearing dogs have reported that dogs have not only alerted them to burglars in their homes or gardens, but have also warned of characters approaching unexpectedly in deserted streets, even in broad daylight.

This is a common occurrence in larger towns. The hearing impaired who have hearing dogs become very used to relying on them in strange situations. Loss of hearing is an invisible but very real handicap to active participation in many facets of our society. Although the use of hearing dogs will never replace the pleasure and joy associated with the sensation of sound, it will afford a degree of protection to those of our fellow citizens who are not able to enjoy those pleasures personally.

I often think we take for granted the many pleasures which we can experience but which some of those less fortunate than ourselves cannot. That particularly applies to the deaf. I often feel—particularly as one of those who enjoy music of any sort—that it is an advantage that we take for granted and do not consider seriously.

I am sure that honourable members will realise the need and the assistance that can be rendered by guide dogs assisting their owners in moving to and from or seeking employment, in just going about their everyday business, and in relaxing at home in the knowledge that ears other than their own are protecting them. I commend the proposed amendment to the Dog Control Act to the House as a most humane measure. I hope that it will be accepted on a bipartisan basis. I commend the Bill to the House.

The Hon. T.H. HEMMINGS secured the adjournment of the debate.