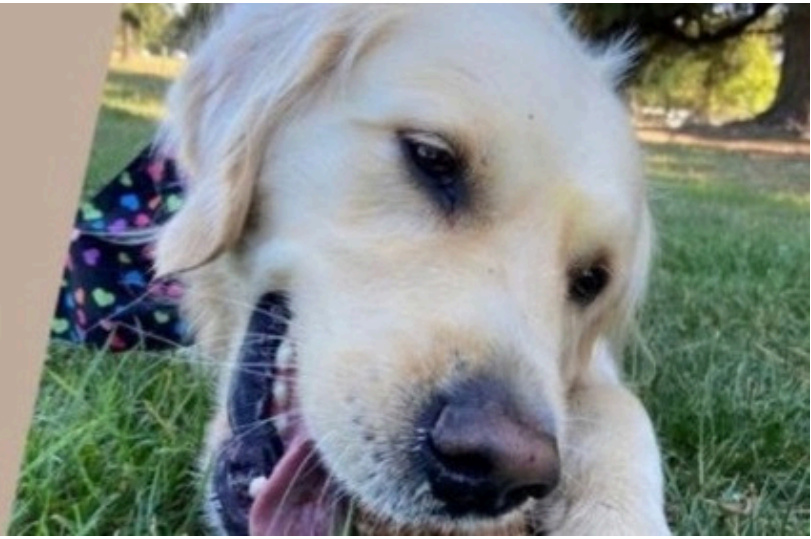




Professional Dog Handling statement - Public Safety, and the Responsible Use of Training Equipment

**Dear Rt Hon Winston Peters,
Rt Hon Simon Watts,**

Officials involved in the review of the Dog Control Act 1996,
Officials responsible for the Animal Welfare Act 1999,
Chief Executives and Animal Management Teams of New Zealand Territorial Authorities,
I write to you in my capacity as President of Christchurch Professional Dog Walkers Incorporated (CPDW Inc) regarding the current public discussion surrounding professional dog handling, the rehoming of retired racing greyhounds, the ongoing review of the Dog Control Act 1996, and the future direction of professional competency standards within New Zealand.



Recent public commentary has included references to the “weaponisation” of electronic collars and calls for further restrictions on training equipment. While CPDW Inc strongly condemns the deliberate misuse or abuse of any training equipment, we believe it is essential that legislation and public policy remain grounded in evidence, competency, and public safety rather than assumptions about individual tools.

CPDW Inc does not support the misuse, abuse, or weaponisation of any training aid. Whether the equipment is a flat collar, harness, head halter, slip lead, long line, prong collar, electronic collar, or any other device, responsibility rests with the competence, ethics, judgement, and accountability of the individual using it.

The issue is not the tool itself.

The issue is the intention to misuse it and the competency of the person operating it.

As an example, New Zealand does not prohibit qualified builders from using hammers, skill saws, nail guns, or other construction equipment simply because those tools have the potential to be misused. Instead, industries regulate competency. Apprentices learn under experienced professionals, receive practical supervision, develop sound judgement, and are expected to demonstrate competence before working independently.

Professional dog handling should be approached using the same principles.

A lead can be used incorrectly. A harness can cause injury when improperly fitted or misused. Food can be used coercively. Every handling aid carries responsibility. Removing one category of equipment does not remove poor handling; it merely shifts poor handling elsewhere. The focus should therefore remain on the competency of the handler rather than assuming a particular tool determines welfare outcomes.

CPDW Inc does not advocate indiscriminate use of electronic collars, nor do we suggest they are appropriate for every dog. They represent one tool within a much broader behavioural toolbox and should only ever be considered where appropriate, proportionate, ethically justified, and used by individuals who have demonstrated practical competency. In many cases they are unnecessary. In some circumstances, other approaches may be more appropriate. Professional judgement should always be based on the individual dog, public safety considerations, and welfare outcomes.

As New Zealand transitions following the greyhound racing industry closure and continues reviewing the Dog Control Act 1996, we believe there is an opportunity to modernise professional dog handling through nationally consistent competency standards.

Rather than regulating equipment in isolation, we encourage Government to regulate competency.

CPDW Inc supports practical, evidence-based competency frameworks that assess real-world handling ability, risk assessment, canine behaviour, learning theory, welfare, legal responsibilities, emergency response, and public safety through practical assessment alongside theoretical knowledge.

Where appropriate, Government should also consider recognised workplace competency frameworks, including NZQCF-listed frameworks, as part of developing nationally consistent professional standards. Such frameworks provide an objective means of assessing practical capability rather than relying solely on classroom-based theory, internal organisational assessments, or self-declared experience.

In our view, competency should be demonstrated—not assumed.

As councils continue exercising professional exemption powers under local bylaws and as central government considers future legislative reform, consistency across New Zealand will become increasingly important. Professional handlers should be assessed against transparent, measurable competency standards that are capable of independent scrutiny and applied consistently, regardless of the territorial authority in which they operate.

This approach strengthens public confidence while protecting both animal welfare and community safety.

CPDW Inc remains committed to working constructively with central government, territorial authorities, industry stakeholders, educators, and welfare organisations to develop practical, evidence-based standards that place competency, accountability, and public safety at the centre of professional dog handling.

We would welcome the opportunity to contribute to any future consultation regarding the Dog Control Act 1996, the Animal Welfare Act 1999, professional competency standards, or nationally consistent assessment frameworks for professional dog handlers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Brittany Johnson

President

Christchurch Professional Dog Walkers Incorporated (CPDW Inc)