

The Honourable Vince McKay
Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs

Actions to Improve Animal Welfare in the Northwest Territories

Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to Written Question asked by the Member for Great Slave on October 29, 2025, regarding Actions to Improve Animal Welfare in the Northwest Territories.

I can confirm that the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs has not undertaken any formal policy or legislative work related to the *Dog Act* in the past five years. However, it is important to note previous reforms that have already been made to strengthen animal welfare protections in the NWT.

The *Dog Act* has evolved from a basic control law in the 1950s into a comprehensive animal welfare statute. In 2011, the Act underwent significant reform to bring it in line with modern welfare standards. This included prohibiting causing distress to dogs and requiring owners to provide adequate food, water, shelter, medical care, and protection from harsh weather. Enforcement powers were expanded, enabling Animal Protection Officers to seize distressed dogs and act urgently without warrants, while municipal bylaw officers gained authority within their jurisdictions. Traditional practices, including hunting and dog sledding, remain permitted provided they meet humane standards. Penalties increased dramatically from a \$25 fine to up to \$2,500 or three months' imprisonment for first offences, and up to \$10,000 or six months imprisonment for repeat offences.

Technical amendments in 2012 and 2013 clarified enforcement and jurisdiction. Overall, these changes strengthened animal protection, improved compliance, and balanced welfare standards with cultural traditions.

Mr. Speaker, the Member also asked about expenditures related to enforcement of the Act. It is important to emphasize that requiring community governments to provide five years of detailed cost estimates would not be practical and would place an undue burden on community governments that are already managing significant fiscal and operational pressures. Enforcement roles in community governments are multi-purpose positions with no separate accounting for time or resources spent specifically on *Dog Act* enforcement.

The Act establishes a territorial framework for dog welfare and public safety, but it is ultimately up to each community government to determine how, and to what extent, they choose to enforce the Act within their local community. The Act is designed to provide flexibility so communities can address dog control and welfare issues in a manner that reflects their specific needs, circumstances and priorities. This includes the authority for communities to adopt tailored local bylaws, establish enforcement practices that work for them, and determine the resources they can reasonably dedicate to this area.

The Government of the Northwest Territories does not prescribe a one-size-fits-all model; rather, the Act empowers communities to shape their own approaches within the broader territorial framework.

MACA supports community governments through legislative authority, guidance, training and technical support. The Act grants municipalities clear authority to establish and enforce local dog control bylaws. MACA provides guidance documents and drafting support to ensure bylaws address key areas such as licensing, control of dogs running at large, and standards of care consistent with the Act.

Through its Community Governance Division, MACA delivers training across six core areas of municipal operations, including Governance and Public Safety. The Public Safety training includes Bylaw Enforcement Officer courses, which cover the *Dog Act* and other relevant legislation. Training opportunities are available online in both self-directed and instructor-led formats. Community government employees can access these programs on the Local Government Administrators of the NWT website under the NWT Community Government Learning Portal. Additionally, MACA offers a webinar focused on bylaw development to assist community administrators in creating clear and enforceable bylaws.

Mr. Speaker, through the Act and the support available to community governments, we continue to uphold strong territorial standards for animal welfare while ensuring communities have flexibility and authority to address their unique local concerns.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.