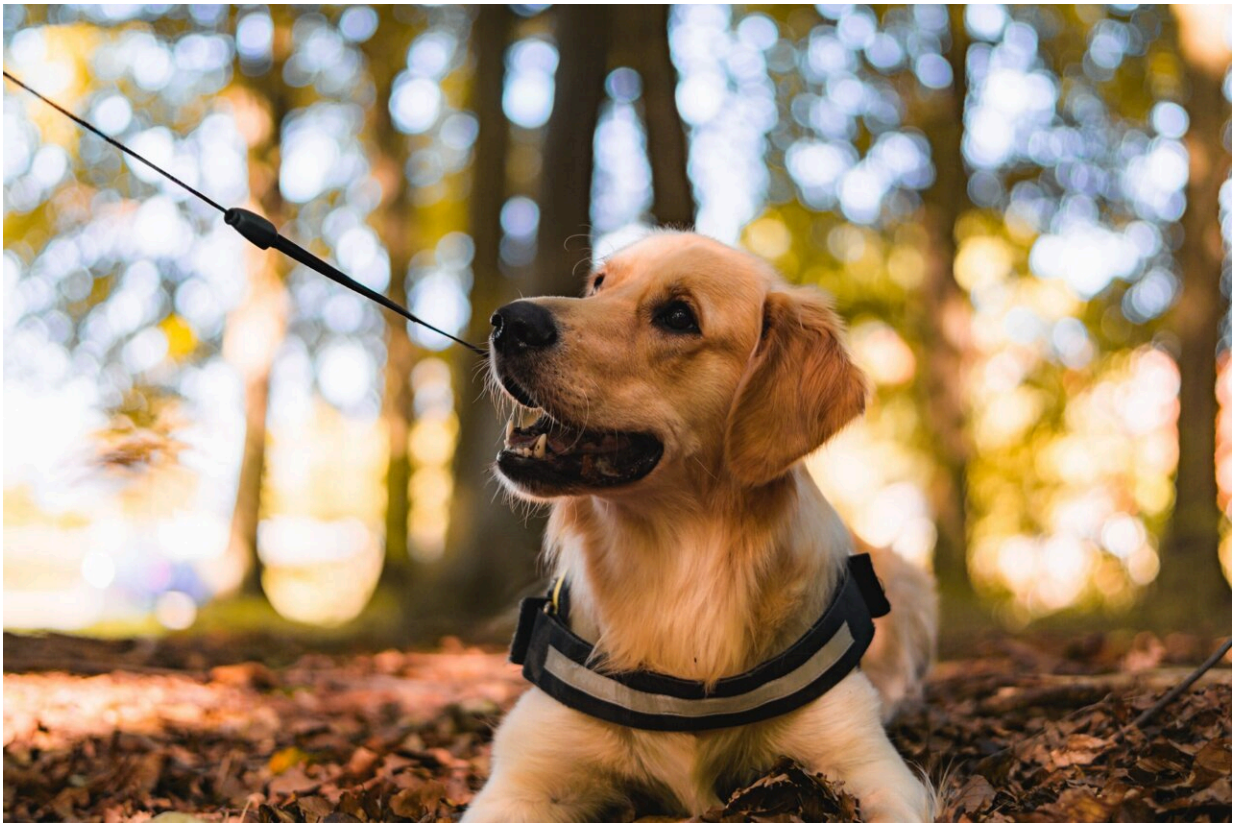


# Australian public calls for more proactive pet laws

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Public opinion is shifting to wanting a more proactive approach to animal welfare rather than a reactive approach to animal cruelty.

University of Adelaide experts asked the Australian public about their perception of the penalties for [animal cruelty](#).

"We found that the vast majority of respondents are in favor of prohibiting offenders from owning animals," says study lead, Ph.D. student Rochelle Morton from the University of Adelaide's School of Animal and Veterinary Science.

"Animal abuse is an issue that provokes strong emotional responses within communities.

"The nature of reform to animal welfare legislation in Australia has commonly been attributed to increasing alignment with the 'community's' expectations' which implies that the community has power in driving legislative change.

"Yet, despite this assertion there has been no publicly available information disclosing the nature of these 'expectations,' or the methodology used to determine the public's stance.

"Based on previous sociological research, as well as legal reforms that have taken place to increase maximum penalties for animal welfare offenses, it is probable that the community expects harsher penalties for offenses."

A total of 2,152 individuals from across the nation participated in the survey.

Dr. Alexandra Whittaker from the School of Animal and Veterinary Science worked on the study which was published in the journal *Frontiers in Animal Science*.

"While we found that 50% of people wanted penalties increased, there

was nearly 80% support for increasing prosecution numbers," she says.

In 2009 Australian research found that 60% of people supported harsher penalties.

"We've interpreted the results of the survey to mean that the public favor a greater number of cases going to court (more enforcement) more so than the court handing down larger fines and jail sentences. It suggests that the enforcement element might be more important than the [penalty](#) element to the public," says Dr. Whittaker.

In 2020–2021 the RSPCA successfully prosecuted 426 cases of animal cruelty in Australia's courts. Currently penalties for animal cruelty offenses vary across the states, but all have provisions for jail terms and fines. Jail terms vary from one year in the Northern Territory to five years in WA and Tasmania and maximum fines for individuals of \$15,700 in the NT and \$287,500 in Queensland. Fines for corporations can be more than a million dollars depending on the jurisdiction.

"This study suggests that there is greater support for preventing animal cruelty through increased enforcement rather than punishing animal cruelty offenders through harsher sentences," says Dr. Whittaker.

"This potentially indicates a shift in [public opinion](#) towards a more proactive approach to [animal welfare](#) law enforcement, rather than a reactive approach to animal cruelty."

**More information:** Rochelle Morton et al, An investigation into 'community expectations' surrounding animal welfare law enforcement in Australia, *Frontiers in Animal Science* (2022). [DOI: 10.3389/fanim.2022.991042](#)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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