

Applicant: Petrina Ryan

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Submissions on applications and proposals to change the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards*

I fully support that the decision to allow companion dogs in outdoor dining areas should be up to the individual food business.

I would like to start out by emphasising the fact that Australia has one of the highest rates of pet ownership in the world with over two thirds of households owning pets (approx 33 million pets). Quite simply, pets are part of the Australian way of life. (Statistic sourced from Australian Companion Animal Council Inc website.)

While Australian society has seen many changes in recent years, the value Australians place on their relationships with their pets remains constant. Pets are part of the family in 63% of Australian households, providing benefits to their owners and the communities they are part of.

91% of pet owners report feeling 'very close' to their pet, reinforcing that pets are an integral member of the family unit. For some people, their pets are their 'kids'. To which I must add that it's very rare to see a misbehaving dog at a restaurant but an all too common occurrence to see a child misbehaving and making a scene. Should kids be banned from restaurants too?

There have been many studies that have proved that pets are good for our health and good for the health of our communities. However despite the proven benefits of pet ownership, it's becoming more difficult to own pets due to a number of factors including government legislation which tries to exclude our companions.

The needs of pets, pet owners and non-pet owners are all legitimate. These needs must be appreciated and integrated with society and the environment to ensure that people and pets live harmoniously.

I fully support that dogs should be allowed in outdoor dining areas. It should be at the restaurants owners discretions, not government dictating who restaurants can serve. There are two main objections to the dogs being allowed in outdoor dining debate

1. They present a risk to food hygiene
2. They may misbehave and be a nuisance.

The food hygiene risk argument has just been squashed with as documented in the risk assessment completed - ' *the potential risk of food borne transmission from companion dogs to outdoor dining settings to humans considered very low or negligible.*

And in rebuttal to the second point, the majority of dog owners are responsible, and the type of person who takes their dog to an outdoor eating area has a trained, well cared for dog. It should be up to the restaurant owner to refuse to serve someone who has a misbehaving dog. The restaurant owner pays a yearly permit fee to use the outdoor dining area and so should be entitled to **manage the area as they please**. It's just common sense that if the dogs behaves, then it shouldn't be a problem.

Business's are struggling enough at the moment, they don't need any more government restrictions which will reduce their patronage numbers. Dog owners will simply choose to not eat it out if it means their beloved dog will miss out on being at their side.

Living on the Sunshine Coast many locals start off their day with a morning walk with the family dog, enjoying the natural beauty the coast offers followed by a relaxed breakfast at a local café, where the dog sits quietly under the table. Despite the fact its current to ban dogs in outdoor dining areas, the majority of restaurants still encourage it as they understand that they will lose a large proportion of their business should they turn dogs away. Should the restaurant owner ban our dogs we no longer sit at their restaurants.

If you look at restaurants in Europe you find there are not as many restrictions. In addition, if you look at the whole culture in Europe you will see a total difference in how they view eating out, pets, cleanliness and where value is placed. In fact USA have dogs in the airports eating arenas as they transit with their owners.

Australians could learn from our European cousins in how to incorporate our pets into our everyday society. Household dogs are not dirty, or poisonous to our food and do not pose health hazards in restaurants. Think of how many people have pets in their homes all over the world. Do any of us fall victim to disease because our pet lies at our feet when we are cooking or under the table while we eat? NO!

Obviously there will be the small minority who disagree with allowing pets in outdoor dining areas. If the decision to allow companion dogs in outdoor dining areas was up to the individual food business then this minority could dine at the food business who choose to be pet free. Similar to smoking before the new laws were brought in. If you must have restaurants nominate a zone for owners and their pets.