



Tracy-Lynne Geysen

Animal instincts

TLG Lawyers is the first law firm in Australia to practise animal law. It has become popular in the US and is growing in Australia with universities now teaching the subject as part of a standard law degree. Firm principle Tracy-Lynne Geysen is also a founding member of BLEATS (Brisbane Lawyers Advocating and Educating for Tougher Sentences), a group set up in 2007 for prosecuting matters on a pro bono basis for the RSPCA. She sets Brisbane Legal straight on the firm's modus operandi.

There will be a lot of people barking up the wrong tree on this. What exactly is animal law?

First of all, I can tell you that animal law is not mediation between a cat and a dog as one funny person said to me recently.

Animal law that I will be focussing on includes regulation of 'dangerous dogs', body corporate exclusion of pets, and the management of unwanted dogs and cats (addressed in the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008 (Qld), which commenced 1 July 2009), veterinary liability for malpractice, estate planning for pets, pet 'custody' disputes.

Our firm won't be acting for people accused of animal cruelty or neglect matters though as I am still and always will be involved with BLEATS (Brisbane Lawyers Educating and Advocating for Tougher Sentences) the group of lawyers doing pro bono work for the RSPCA.

In the US animal law is considered a legitimate and growing legal practise. How is it perceived among Australian legal professionals and is this perception changing?

In the USA animal law has been a fast and growing area of law as I understand it for the last 20 or so years. Given the fact that we are the only firm in Australia to practise animal law and that we are answering questions such as these for this article and I think it is probably fair to say that we are only just now embracing it as an area of law, albeit very slowly.

In starting up in this area of law we have been greatly assisted by Voiceless and in particular Katrina Sharman, legal counsel of Voiceless, whose mission statement is to 'bring the institutionalised suffering of animals to the forefront of Australia's agenda; ensuring that animal protection is the next great social justice movement'. And they say that 15 or so years ago people scoffed at environmental law as an area of law and look at how huge that has now become so this is what I am hoping and expecting, for animal law in Australia.

With several major national universities including Bond and Griffith now teaching animal law, will this practise see a major boom in popularity much like environmental law?

Absolutely. Since I have started I have been told by about 10 people that are planning on taking animal law as an undergraduate or a postgraduate subject, or want to and a couple of people have said they want to practise in animal law. I am joined by Steven White of Griffith Uni as our animal law consultant and he was one of the first lecturers in Australia to lecture in animal law.

How have animal rights groups such as the RSPCA responded to the official opening of a firm practising animal law in Australia?

The RSPCA in Queensland has been so supportive and I have been so very lucky to have formed a strong alliance with them through my involvement with BLEATS. Many of them (who were not in Murgon for the puppy farm raid) came to the opening party on 9/9/2009 including Mark Townend the CEO and Michael Beatty the media and communications relations manager and Anna Hartley the appeals and campaign manager.

I am so grateful and honoured and really blown away every day by their support. It is just so amazing and so lucky for me. I am in absolute awe of them and the work they do and feel so

privileged to have such a good relationship with them.

I have to mention Tracey Jackson the deputy chief inspector of the RSPCA. I liaise with mostly as a result of BLEATS work and her support of the firm has been unwavering as well. I have had three referrals from Tracey that have come from the RSPCA to date.

Dr Cam Day the animal behaviouralist has also been a source of referrals and tells me that it is good we have started in this area as there has been a need for it for some time.

What type of cases is Australia seeing in the practise of animal law?

I have recently been approached by someone as equally passionate about animals for a joint collaboration to help (the plight of) factory farmed animals. I am just in the process of getting back to her about this, it may be something that BLEATS is better suited to assist her with.

So far I have acted for clients who have opposed dangerous dog declarations and for one person whose cat was killed by two neighbouring dogs.

