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Dog Aggression - Management & Minimisation - Urban Animal Management Position

Preamble

Predisposing influences that presage a dog aggression incident include all of the following:

- 1. The temperament of the dog (inherited and acquired)
- The competence of the owner (selection, socialisation, training & control)
- 3. The environmental circumstances (prevailing stimuli)

To be effective, bite prevention measures need to accommodate this *whole* package.

The following four "fighting" breeds are currently classed as prohibited Australian imports¹: Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino, Fila Brasilerio, American Pit Bull Terrier. Dog fighting is illegal throughout Australia and it *does* therefore make sense to prohibit importation of the kinds of dogs that have a history of having been bred for fighting. Some states have followed this Federal Customs cue by also placing various legislative restrictions on the keeping of these breeds of dogs.

There are three major problems however with the use of "breed specifics" in the control of dangerousness in dogs:

- 1. Different dog breeds are identified as being separate, one from the rest, mainly on the basis of *appearance*.
- 2. Appearance is *not* a reliable determining factor in the prediction of animal behaviour
- 3. The theory that anatomical appearance can be used as a predictor of behavioural character (encapsulated in historical concepts of human physiognomy and phrenology) was universally discredited by the scientific community more than 100 years ago.

It is true to say that some behaviour traits in dogs (including temperament) are inherited to a certain extent. Heritability is a genetic effect and because breed standards do create a degree of genetic homogeneity in breed lines, it is possible for experienced dog handlers to make generalized predictions about some breed-typical traits including perhaps lower aggression threshold tendencies. However, for dog breed to reliably and consistently correlate with dog behaviour, both of the following prerequisite assumptions must hold true:

Assumption 1: That the breeds in question homogenious with respect to the trait dependent genes in question. This prerequisite requires genetic homogeneity both from place to place and from time to time. This is never the case because genetically dependant traits can be bred out as easily as they can be bred in to any given line.

Assumption 2: That the expression of the behaviour in question is *not* going to be influenced to a significant extent by that dog's developmental and physical environment. This is never going to be the case either. In fact, the *opposite* is always more likely to be true.

The National Consultative Committee on Animal Welfare position Statement #24 (1995) says: "The definition of a dangerous dog should be based on the individual dog's behaviour, **not** on an individual breed". UAM supports this position.

Best practice in aggression minimisation

The pathway of continuous improvement towards best practices in dog aggression minimization depends, *before all else*, on information access. Improved methods of incident *recording* should be implemented as the first step towards better management of dog aggression.

- A solid body of incident related data is necessary to provide a logical basis for remedial measures
- Reliable assessment of remedial performance is not possible in the absence of on-going incident data analysis
- Benchmarking incident trends depends on the comparative analysis of key performance indicators (both horizontally and longitudinally) and this requires that incident data should continue to be collected indefinitely

Incident data is needed firstly, secondly and thirdly if real progress in reducing the incidence of dog aggression is expected.

Some states of Australia are presently moving towards the establishment of state registries for dogs that have been declared dangerous. Other state governments will most likely follow suit in due course. These Dangerous Dog registries should ideally gather both aggression incident data and dangerous dog details in each case that is recorded. The dangerous dog details and the incident data parameters should be collected and recorded in a standard way to allow the sharing and comparing of data, statistics and key performance indicators.

Aggression perspective

- 1. The determination of dangerousness is context specific.
- The concept of dangerousness of dogs can reasonably be extended to include dog-related aggression involving livestock and other animals.
- Aggression is a consequence of a range of different behavioural causes. Different types of dog aggression are recognized. Predatory aggression is, for example, quite differently motivated to territorial or defensive aggression.
- Regardless of cause, aggression is aggression and bite injuries are bite injuries. Consequences of dog aggression are defined by the event rather than by the dog's motivation.
- 5. There are multiple levels in the recognition of severity in aggressive dog incidents.
- 6. It must be recognised that a dog of any breed or type can be dangerous, although breed type can have a bearing on thresholds of aggression
- 7. It is only from known incidents of aggression that determination of dangerousness can be made
- 8. A standard method of recording aggressive dog incidents is important from the point of view that interpreting data from multiple sources is otherwise not possible
- It should be possible for a national DOG AGGRESSION DATABASE information management system to costeffectively collect, store and collate aggressive incident report data from across Australia to produce and then

 $^{^{\}scriptsize 1}$ Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations, 1956, Schedule 1 Goods the importation of which is prohibited absolutely, Regulation 3

- disseminate statistics, trends and benchmarks regarding aggressive incidents of all kinds.
- 10. In each case where an aggressive dog incident has occurred and come under the jurisdiction of a local authority, fines should be charged to the owners of the dog or person responsible, sufficient to cover (among other things) the cost of incident recording at the local authority as well as associated state and national registry expenses
- 11. Legislation should be enacted preventing people who have bad records relating to aggressive dog incidents from keeping dogs (for a specified period of time)
- 12. A standard range of post-aggression incident measures related to the grade of attack e.g. signage, muzzling, fencing, penalties and public liability etc will allow consistency in the handling of aggressive dog incidents by different local authorities across Australia
- 13. There should be uniformity between all states and territories in Australia in the way aggressive dog incidents are handled in general terms including investigation, recording and reporting
- 14. All Animal Management Officers (AMOs) and other relevant authorities should be encouraged to promote measures designed to improve safety aspects of dog ownership to thereby minimise the risk of aggression incidents
- 15. After an aggressive dog incident, a veterinarian of the authorities' choice, at the expense of the owner, should whenever possible be asked to examine the dog in question to check its state of health and add this data to the incident record
- 16. All AMOs and other relevant personnel should be appropriately trained to ensure a good understanding of all the following:
 - Causes of aggression
 - Types of aggression
 - Signs of aggression
 - Prevention of aggression
 - Dealing with aggression incidents
 - The National Policy on Dog Aggression.

Coordination imperative

The Urban Animal Management Advisory Group of the AVA has developed the following standard template approach to the handling of dog aggression incidents that fall under the jurisdiction of local authorities Australia wide. This position statement is based heavily on the opinion and recommendation outcomes from delegate workshops at the National UAM conferences in Melbourne (2001), Alice Springs (2002) and Caloundra (2003). The emphasis is on interstate cooperation.

All the following are important reasons why Australia's approach to "aggressive dog" incident minimization should, if possible, be nationally coordinated by the use of a minimum standard process template:

 Microchips - Microchip ID for dangerous dogs will fail to reliably link animal to owner in a *national* context in the absence of nationally uniform methodology for the use of microchips in this application

- Interstate mobility Like all other pet animals,
 "aggressive dogs" will also be moving from town to
 town and state to state all the time. Declarations of
 dangerousness and the consequential owner
 constraints must be consistent wherever the dog
 subsequently goes, anywhere in Australia
- Clarity of responsibility Responsibilities of dog owners and local authorities with respect to dog aggression response and prevention will, through uniformity, have greatest clarity if "aggressive dogs" incident processes are consistent across all interstate and inter-municipal boundaries
- Cost effectiveness Public awareness programs about this subject will be more cost efficient if everyone is working to the same plan
- 5. Data integrity The recording of details, after aggressive incidents have occurred, will provide poor reference data in a national context *unless* everyone is working with the same framework of attack definitions and the same framework of circumstance/situation factor descriptors.
- 6. Data analysis More data means better statistics. Better understanding of dog aggression means better options for aggression prevention, including better legislation & regulation. The "pooling" of data from different databases can provide better quality statistics but only if standard data gathering technique is used.
- 7. Performance benchmarking State and Municipal dog aggression management performance should be benchmarked and useful benchmarking depends on having a coordinated approach that provides uniformity of assessment and recording methods. (see The template - grading of Dog Aggression incidents)

It is recognized that Local, State and Federal Governments or departments have legislation or By Laws facilitating or enacting the Declaration of a "Restricted Breed" or "Dangerous Dog". These include Guard or patrol dogs or other dogs that has undergone any part or form of attack training. Dogs within these categories and those of a declared restricted breed may never have been associated with a reported aggressive dog incident.

For these categories of "restricted" dogs it is advised that the following consequential measures may mandatorily be required by legislation:

- 1. Identification using an Australian Standard microchip with data on an accredited registry.
- 2. Owner obligation to undergo an approved training course in responsible ownership.
- Dogs to be kept while on the owners property in a specified enclosure
- Handlers of Patrol Dogs be obliged to be appropriately trained
- Desexing, muzzling in public, special visual collar markers, extra degrees of physical restraint in public places etc. may also be required

Issues relevant community self regulation (non legislative codes of practice) re dog aggression minimization

- Dog breeding Only dogs of an acceptable temperament should be bred for sale to the general public.
- Dog showing Dogs that behave aggressively during any aspect of showing or judging, should be disqualified from competition and should prompt consideration that the breedline in question might be discontinued
- Temperament in breed standards Breed clubs should enter into a code of practice that ensures as much attention must be given to temperament as it presently is to conformation and training
- Pounds and Shelters All dogs re-homed by pounds and shelters should pass temperament tests
- Dog Purchase Prospective dog owners should be encouraged to evaluate the requirements and therefore the suitability of the potential pet dogs prior to purchase
- Public awareness Information relevant to socialization, obedience training, competent/responsible dog ownership, owner obligations and responsibilities, local dog laws, basic animal welfare and bite risks should be available to all dog owners and especially with all puppies purchased
- Puppy socialisation Puppy school and normal positive socialisation experiences with other people and other animals during the critical interval of the socialization period of puppy development is necessary and should be encouraged
- Obedience training All dogs should be obedience trained sufficient to give owner/handlers adequate effective control of them
- Environmental enrichment All dogs need to be provided with an adequate activity program to minimize stress and tension that can lead to aggression
- Education of children Instruction should be provided to children on how to behave around dogs.
- Reality check Dog owners should be educated that all dogs have the potential to bite.
- Guard dogs Owner/handlers should have appropriate qualifications and the dogs should be trained and restrained properly at all times

Recommended Aggression Incident Severity Scale

DESCRIPTION	CONSEQUENCE
Dog that exhibits unacceptable aggression without actually biting	a. Dog must be identified using an Australian Standard microchip with data on an accredited registry
	b. Owner and dog must undergo approved training courses
	c. Dog must be on leash and under control at all times when off the owner's property
	d. Must not have access from the driveway to the front door of the owner's property
2. Dog that inflicts a single (not severe) bite wound in a situation where provocation of the dog has been	a. Dog must be identified using an Australian Standard microchip with data on an accredited registry
established as a significant causal factor.	b. Owner and dog must undergo approved training courses
	c. Dog must be on leash and under control at all times when off the owner's property
	d. Must not have access from the driveway to the front door of the owner's property.
3. Dog that inflicts a single (not severe) bite wound without provocation.	a. Dog must be identified using an Australian Standard microchip with data on an accredited registry.
	b. Owner and dog must undergo approved training courses
	c. Dog must be on leash, under control and muzzled at all times when off premises.
	d. Must not have access to path between gate and front door and with an approved warning sign.
	e. Dog must be desexed at owner's expense.
	f. Must wear an approved identifying collar
	g. Owner must obtain public liability insurance to keep the dog.
4. Dog that inflicts multiple bite wounds in a situation where provocation of the dog has been	a. Dog must be identified using an Australian Standard microchip with data on an accredited registry.
established as a significant causal factor.	b. Owner and dog must undergo approved training courses
	c. Dog must be on leash, under control and muzzled at all times when off premises.
	d. Must not have access to path between gate and front door and with an approved warning sign.
	e. Dog must be desexed at owner's expense.
	f. Must wear an approved identifying collar
	g. Owner must obtain public liability insurance to keep the dog.
5. Dog that inflicts multiple bite wounds without provocation	a. Euthanasia unless owner prepared to make exceptional efforts including all of the above for levels 4 & 5 plus confinement to a child/dog proof enclosure
6. Life threatening attack (potential grievous bodily	a. Euthanasia
harm)	b. Prohibition order for owner

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