

## Declared Dog Database – What can it do? How could we use it better?

Presenter: Tracy Helman, Manager Policy & Education, Bureau of Animal Welfare Victoria

Email: [tracy.helman@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:tracy.helman@dpi.vic.gov.au)

One of the primary purposes of the Victorian Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994 (DFNA Act) is to promote responsible ownership of dogs and cats and protect the environment by providing for; the identification and control of dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs.

In Victoria a dog can be declared menacing if the dog has rushed at or chased a person or the dog has been declared a menacing dog in another State or Territory (section 41A(1)(a)&(b) DFNA Act). A dangerous dog is a dog that is kept as a guard dog for the purposes of guarding non-residential premises or a dog that has been trained to attack or bite any person or any thing when attached to or worn by a person (section 34A(a)&(b) DFNA Act) A dog can be declared dangerous by council should it cause death or serious injury to a person or animal by biting or attacking the person or animal OR if the dog has been found menacing more than twice OR if the dog has been declared dangerous in another State or Territory (section 34(1)(a)(b)&(c) DFNA Act).

A dog can be declared a restricted breed dog if an authorised officer is of the opinion that a dog is a restricted breed dog. If the declaration is upheld the owner will only be permitted to keep the dog if the dog was acquired before November 2005.

In 2004 the DFNA Act was amended to require the Secretary (of the Department of Primary Industries) to keep a register of dangerous and menacing dogs and dogs that have been declared to be restricted breed (section 44AB DFNA Act).

In fact in the second reading speech, of the Primary Industries Legislation (further miscellaneous amendments) Bill in the 2004 Spring session, it was recorded in parliament that the purpose of the Bill was to provide for the establishment of a central register for dangerous, menacing, and restricted breed dogs under the Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994. The Minister went on to state: *"This register will provide councils with the ability to determine whether a dog that has changed ownership or been moved to a new municipality has been previously declared as dangerous, menacing or a restricted breed with one query. The amendments contained in the bill will introduce new mandatory reporting requirements for owners of dangerous, menacing, and restricted breed dogs and the municipal councils in which such dogs are located. Municipal councils will be required to forward on information regarding dangerous, menacing, and restricted breed dogs for inclusion in the central registry. Under the new requirements, the owners of such dogs will be required to notify municipal councils of changes to their address or to the location of the dog, in addition to their existing reporting requirements. This information will also be forwarded on to maintain the currency of the registry."*

The Victorian Government (Department of Primary Industries, Bureau of Animal Welfare) established the Victorian Declared Dog Registry (VDDR) as a reporting system to address section 44AB of the DFNA Act.

The VDDR has had about 13 small variations in the recent twelve month period including the addition of a user manual and updated reporting facilities that should be beneficial to all users.

### Using the data base

The database is only as useful and current as the information put in. It currently provides three major purposes:

1. Meet the obligations of the DFNA Act.
2. Provide a 'snap shot' that is not less than 24 hours old on the whereabouts of declared dogs in the state of Victoria.
3. Provides a tool for councils to use to meet their own reporting and compliance (Domestic Animal Management Plans, OH&S etc).

It should be noted that Section 44AC of the DFNA Act provides clear guidelines on who can access the register.

### Access

For assistance in using the database there is now a manual available once you are logged in. Access for the database is through secure log-in ([Https://ddvic.registry-service.com/index.php](https://ddvic.registry-service.com/index.php)).

All councils have access to the site.

## Summary

### What is the database?

It is important to remember the reason and purpose for this database is to meet the requirements of the DFNA Act that the Secretary keeps a register of dangerous and menacing dogs and dogs that have been declared to be restricted breed and **“...to provide councils with the ability to determine whether a dog that has changed ownership or been moved to a new municipality has been previously declared as dangerous, menacing or a restricted breed with one query.**

Additionally; the database is a great tool for assisting councils in managing compliance for the specific requirement in the Domestic Animal Management Plans requiring all councils to effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in that district and to ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with the Act and the regulations (section 68A (2) (vii) DFNA Act).

If used correctly by all users then the database is adequate for compliance and information.

### What is the database not?

This database cannot be used as a true and complete data management /research tool for the State of Victoria; it is **not** a dog attack reporting system:

The database cannot be used as a research tool for collecting data as it could provide skewed results for a variety of reasons:

- Data is incomplete as it does not provide information on dogs destroyed under court or council or owner order, they are generally never entered onto the database – especially if dog was not micro-chipped
- Data is skewed as it is inconsistent– councils vary in their application of the Act. The fact that some councils report no dogs, could reflect council policy to destroy dogs so they won't appear on database, or they may have no Declared Dogs policy, or may not realise the requirement of recording guard dogs or menacing dogs or attack trained dogs
- Data is skewed as it is inconsistent. Information is entered about the 'type' of dog and with cross breeds it varies on what the dog most looks like or what the owner registered the dog to be, this could lead to some breeds being unfairly over represented
- Data is not correct as under attacked species there is no selection available for human (Child 0–4) so it is unclear what category is selected and that could create miss representation of some data

### Can we use it better?

In its current format the only means of improvement of the database use would be for greater consistency of input to make the data of more value. The database is accessible by all 79 Victorian councils but it does not have an entry from all 79 councils. This could mean some council are still not using the database or that some council's have different policies in relation to declared dogs in their council boundaries.

For the State Government to invest in any further changes in the future to this database it would need to be sure that all councils were committed to input of data in a consistent manner and that the information would provide data that was of use to the State and Local Government.

## Acknowledgements

Steven Moore and Lily Petreska for their dedication and hard work on all manners dangerous!

Rick Walduck and CAR who are always helpful and hold the contract for the management of the database (under section 44AI DFNA Act – Secretary may contract out management of the register)

## About the author

Tracy Helman has been employed by the Bureau of Animal Welfare (Victorian Government) since December 2007. Her key role is Manager of Policy and Education specifically for Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals legislation. The role oversees the Responsible Pet Ownership community, school and kinder programs, the “We are Family” program and “Who's for Cats?” campaign along with compliance and licensing. Tracy has a Post Graduate Diploma in Reproductive Science from Monash University, a Diploma in Applied Science (Animal Technology) and also holds a Certificate 4 in Workplace Assessment and Training. Previously Tracy was the Manager of Animal Ethics and Research at Peter MacCallum Cancer Hospital and has taught Genetics, Advanced Animal Breeding and Animal Ethics and Welfare as part of the Animal Care and Management training package. Tracy is a member of the board or Primary Skills Victoria the Industry Training Advisory Board for the Animal Care and Management, Agriculture and Conservation Management training packages and sits on a wide variety of national Industry training committees.