

## **Breed Specific Legislation - Position Statement**

The ANKC supports reasonable, enforceable, non-discriminatory laws to govern the ownership of dogs.

The ANKC believes that dog owners should be responsible for their dogs. We support laws that establish a fair process by which specific dogs are identified as 'dangerous', based on stated measurable actions; impose appropriate penalties on irresponsible owners; and establish a well-defined method for dealing with dogs proven to be dangerous.

We believe that, if necessary, dogs proven to be 'dangerous' may need to be humanely destroyed.

The ANKC strongly opposes any legislation that determines a dog to be 'dangerous' based on specific breeds or phonetic classes of dogs.

### **Rationale:**

Dog Ownership (42% of all Australian households have a dog) is an integral part of Australian society. All Australians come into contact with dogs at sometime in their lives.

It is unfortunate that from time to time dogs have attacked people in society. These attacks range from rushing a person through to fatal injuries to human beings.

Controlling Canine bodies throughout the world have always put forward the message that one should judge the deed and not the breed when a dog attack takes place. The ANKC strongly supports this point of view.

Dogs offer companionship, social, physiological, health and financial benefits to many Australians. At the same time we all acknowledge that there is a small minority of dog owners who do not act responsibly and do not care for their dogs, which has resulted in dog attacks.

The media has well publicised these attacks and at times Governments and local Councils have given a knee-jerk reaction to these attacks and tried to introduce legislation that has not been well thought out and not appropriate to resolving the problem.

The problem can only be resolved by one identifying the reasons for the dog attack, secondly identifying the most common factors in dog attacks, and thirdly determining the most appropriate legislation which would involve education, penalties, etc, to reduce dog attacks.

Breed specific legislation has been introduced overseas in such countries as England and in some states of the USA, and has proven to date to be ineffective. The UK Dangerous Dogs Act of 1991 has proven to be ineffective and subsequent studies, after the Act was introduced in England, clearly show that the legislation had no effect.

The recent legislation introduced in Germany was a result of a knee-jerk reaction to what one might describe as gross irresponsible dog ownership in modern times. The German legislation was draconian to say the least and it has far reaching ramifications and puts into question the ownership of some of the most popular breeds such as the Golden Retriever in doubt as a suitable dog.

The ANKC like many other canine bodies around the world does not support breed specific legislation, as there are no imperial studies to support such legislation. The ANKC believes further research by Governments and educational institutions should be conducted prior to any legislation taking place. Government should further research the existing imperial studies into dog attacks to determine the clear reasons for such dog attacks. At the same time we believe it is important that the Government adopts an education program at pre-school, primary and secondary schools as well as a general community at large to help them understand the behaviour of a dog as most Australians will come into contact with dogs regularly in their daily life.

The ANKC strongly believes in assisting the public in selecting their dog, socialising the dog, training the dog and making them fully aware of their responsibilities in owning a dog. The ANKC supports strong legislation and prosecution of dog owners who act in an irresponsible way, as we strongly believe that the irresponsible owner should be penalised rather than solely the dog, for inappropriate social actions.

The ANKC believes that state authorities, Canine Associations, Veterinary Associations, and animal behaviourists should be working together to understand dog attacks and translate that information to the public.

The ANKC strongly supports the development of the Good Citizen Awards that are presently in place in the UK and USA, where responsible dog ownership is appropriately awarded in the community. The ANKC believes that each State Government should follow the initiative of the Victorian state government where they have developed a responsible pet ownership program that is going into all primary schools in Victoria. This program is a first in the world and has been popularly received across Victoria. The program is further supported by a community advertising program.

In conclusion, it is important that Governments look at legislation for dangerous dogs in a responsible way and that they do not make hasty legislation, as in the case of Germany. Education, balanced with strict legislation and prosecution of dog owners with offending dogs is by far the most effective way to solve the unsociable acts of irresponsible dog ownership.