

Sensible solutions for dangerous dogs.

12. Current classifications dangerous dogs in Australia.

Table 3.

In most cases, to be declared a dangerous or menacing dog there needs to be a significant event or attack.

While it is essential to have these provisions in place to allow authorities to respond to incidents, it can be seen in many cases as too little too late.

As De Meester (2004) points out >>>”the direct effects of classical dog aggression legislation on the reduction of the number and severity of incidents will be very limited.

The problem is that the existing dog aggression legislation is almost always purely repressive and is rarely preventative.”

The key to dog bite prevention is much earlier identification of potentially dangerous dogs.

Multnomah County in Oregon USA, 1989.

The program was judged to be successful in that, in the five years prior to its implementation, 25% of the dogs involved in bite incidents had bitten again within one year.

After three years under the program, the percentage of dogs repeating the bite behavior within one year was 7% (statistically significant $p=0.01$).

The Oregon model uses a progressive scale to categories and restricts potentially dangerous dogs.

Classification level restrictions.

Level 1 - A dog, while at large, menaces, chases, displays threatening behaviour or aggressive behaviour, or otherwise threatens or endangers the safety of any person or domestic animal.

The dog shall be restrained by a physical device or structure in a manner that prevents the dog from reaching public property or adjoining property.

Level 2 - A dog, while at large, causes physical injury to any domestic animal.

The dog shall be confined within a secure enclosure whenever the dog is not on a leash or inside the home of the owner.

The owner may be required to pass a responsible pet-ownership test.

Level 3 - A dog, while confined, aggressively bites, or causes physical injury to any person.

The dog shall be confined within a secure enclosure, and the owner shall post warning signs provided by the director.

The director may also require liability insurance.

The dog must be muzzled and leashed whenever it is outside the enclosure.

The owner may be required to pass a responsible pet-ownership test.

Level 4 - A dog, while at large, aggressively bites or causes physical injury to any person or kills a domestic animal - same as level 3.

Level 5 - A dog, whether or not confined, causes the serious physical injury or death of any person, is used as a weapon in the commission of a crime, or, having been classified level 4, repeats level 4 behaviour.

The dog shall be euthanized.

In addition, the director may suspend the owner's right to own a dog for a period of time determined by the director.

Table 4 – The Oregon Model classifications for dangerous and potentially dangerous dogs.

The Oregon model.

Significant because it is the only example of a successful animal control or dangerous dog intervention in the published scientific literature.

Essential elements of the Oregon approach.

1. Dogs of many breeds are responsible for dog bite incidents.
2. Upbringing and control exerted by a dog's owners are as important as breed in determining the potential dangerousness of a dog.
3. Dogs that cause serious injury to humans have frequently already exhibited behavioral problems.

The ownership of dogs should be restricted only as far as reasonably necessary to protect the public.

4. Special efforts must be undertaken to teach children skills in interacting with dogs at an early age, and to develop effective ways to warn children of the presence of a potentially dangerous dog.

5. Dogs that pose a reasonably significant threat of causing serious injury to humans or other animals must be identified and subjected to precautionary restrictions.

This approach is like the model proposed by the Australian Veterinary Association's Urban Animal Management group in conjunction with Animal Control Officers from throughout Australia in 2004.

The model was subsequently endorsed by National Consultative Committee on Animal Welfare (NCCAW 34) and accepted by the then Minister for Agriculture (NCCAW 35).

This model recognizes six classifications.

1. Dog that exhibits unacceptable aggression without actually biting.
2. Dog that inflicts a single (not serious) bite wound in a situation where provocation of the dog has been established as a significant causal factor.
3. Dog that inflicts a single (not serious) bite wound without provocation.
4. Dog that inflicts multiple bite wounds in a situation where provocation of the dog has been established as a significant causal factor.
5. Dog that inflicts multiple bite wounds without provocation.
6. Life threatening attack (potential grievous bodily harm) no matter what the cause was.

Each classification level includes progressively more stringent restrictions placed on identified dogs and their owners.

Further details in Appendix 4.

That's it – Gawie Manjaro – MK.

