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## Vets say breed-specific ban won't stop dog attacks

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**Press Release: New Zealand Veterinary Association**

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The Hon Nanaia Mahuta announced today that the Government will introduce new legislation requiring mandatory neutering of dogs classified as menacing by their breed or type, which includes crossbreeds.

The New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA) believes that focusing on dog breeds and types is not the right approach to preventing dog attacks on people.

"We agree with the Minister when she says that dog safety needs good law, good enforcement and support from the community and dog owners," says NZVA spokesperson Steve Merchant. "Like her, we abhor the recent tragedies that have resulted from dog attacks on people and we would like to see dog control tightened.

"However, we are concerned that the proposed changes to dog control law are missing the point. Branding dogs as dangerous by breed or type ignores the fact that all dogs are potentially dangerous."

Aggressive behaviour in dogs is influenced by both genetic and environmental factors, according to the NZVA.

"It is illogical to focus attention on a few specific breeds that are considered dangerous. Any dog that is not properly socialised, or that has been poorly treated, can be at risk of biting people," says Dr Merchant.

He says identification of the breeds contributing to a cross-bred animal is virtually impossible as there is poor correlation between genetic make-up and physical appearance.

"We advise our members that we do not support the use of veterinarians to identify crossbreeds on the basis of visual assessment."

The NZVA does support Ms Mahuta's call for the neutering of menacing dogs.

"The benefit of neutering is not so much the prevention of breeding, as the beneficial effect on behaviour, particularly in male dogs. Aggressive male dogs become much more manageable after they are neutered," says Dr Merchant.

Dr Merchant believes the Government should be looking at ways to make all dog owners take more responsibility for the behaviour of their pets.

He says tightening up the enforcement of current dog control laws would go a long way towards dealing

with the problem of biting dogs.

"Local authorities should take a harder line on unregistered and deal more forcefully with dogs posing threats to people," Dr Merchant says. "However, we would like assurance that there is adequate resourcing for this. There is a large population of unregistered dogs in this country, so addressing that problem would require a substantial workforce of animal control officers who are properly supported."

NZVA believes that microchipping is one of the best ways to clamp down on unregistered and misbehaving dogs. Owners of microchipped dogs can be traced and held responsible if their dog is caught biting or fighting, or simply straying.

As from July last year it became compulsory to microchip pups at six months of age. Over time the percentage of microchipped dogs will increase and, in the future, any dog without a microchip will clearly be an unregistered animal.

"We look forward to making a constructive contribution during the consultative process around the proposed new legislation. Breed-specific bans make for good politics but bad law, and we would be pleased to assist the Government find alternative ways to address the problem of aggressive dogs," says Dr Merchant.

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