



Tuesday, 10 June 2008

Dog breed banning not the answer, committee hears

Animal control officers today argued against legislation banning specific dog breeds, saying even a labrador can be dangerous in the wrong hands.

A parliamentary select committee is hearing submissions on the Dog Control Amendment Bill (No 2) which makes it mandatory for dogs classified as menacing, because they are of a certain breed or type, to be neutered.

The bill also simplifies the process for adding breeds or types to dog control legislation.

A schedule to the legislation lists breeds or types of dogs that may not be imported into New Zealand, and if already here are subject to muzzling when at large.

John Payne, president of the New Zealand Institute of Animal Control Officers, today provided a long list of amendments needed to improve the legislation, which the Government introduced following dog attacks.

He said the institute did not support breed-specific legislation for a number of reasons including because the greatest influence on aggression in dogs was environmental.

Mr Payne told the committee an American pitbull terrier could be an "extremely good animal" in the hands of a responsible owner while a labrador in the wrong hands could be a danger.

"What concerns me when we focus a little bit too much on breed, is we actually take some fairly valuable resources away from the deed which is probably what we should be more looking at."

Councils needed more effective legislation to deal with extremely aggressive dogs.

"Many councils know which ones they're dealing with but are quite hamstrung to be able to actually do something about it until its probably too late."

Mr Payne had no problem with banning importation of certain dogs, so long as the justification for its reputation was there.

People had opinions about certain breeds but not necessarily the statistics to back this up.

"Another classic example is one of the breeds that's actually most responsible for most human fatalities over the last four or five years is a Rottweiler and there's plenty of those already in New Zealand yet they're not on the menacing list."

Asked by Labour MP Marian Hobbs whether there was any breed not already in New Zealand he wanted banned, Mr Payne said a wolf hybrid.

"I think a wolf hybrid is another one that seems to feature quite a bit in a lot of the write-ups from America and I just can't see the point in allowing that in."

In his submission, Mr Payne said the institute did not support the compulsory neutering of dogs classified as menacing.

Waikanae woman Nedra Shand, breeder and shower of Staffordshire Bull terriers, also opposed the emphasis on certain breeds in the legislation.

Little research had been done and it appeared "media hype" against certain breeds led to the Government's "quick fix" legislation, she said.

Mrs Shand said banning dog breeds would not stop the number of attacks or dog bites.

"All dogs bite and to my knowledge, since records have been taken, there have been less than 10 people killed in New Zealand due to dog bites and not one of these has been caused by a dog of the same breed and mostly have been caused by crossbred dogs or mongrels," she said.

- NZPA

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