

SECTION 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Survey Background

- A two-part survey on dog control issues was sent to all 74 territorial authorities on 12 February 2003. Part A of the survey asked councils about their experience with dog control problems, probable causes and possible solutions to these problems, as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness of the current Dog Control Act 1996. Part B sought a range of statistical information for each of the last six and a half years (up to 31/12/2002).
- 73 responses to the survey were received. One of these responding councils was unable to provide any statistical data.

Data Accuracy

- The number of responses to different questions varied and the number of councils responding to some questions is relatively small. In addition, the way in which councils recorded information varied, with some councils providing detailed figures, whereas others were only able to provide aggregated totals or estimates. For these reasons, some of the results reported should be treated as indicative, rather than conclusive, and should not be treated as representative of all 74 councils.
- Despite the limitations of the information recorded in this document, the results provide useful indications of dog control problems and issues experienced by a range of councils when implementing the legislation.

Major Changes From Interim Report

- In March 2003 an interim report on this survey was released. This final report updates the findings in the interim report, using the information received from all the councils that responded to the survey, and presents some additional information.
- This report includes the following information that was not included in the interim report:
 - an analysis of attacks on people attributed by councils to unregistered dogs
 - information for the 2000/2001 and 2001/2002 years on dog attacks resulting in a visit to a public hospital
 - information on the months of the year in which people were discharged after being hospitalised as a result of dog bites (as an indicator of the time of year when dog attacks occur)
 - details of probationary and disqualified dog owners as defined in the Dog Control Act 1996
 - information on dogs classified as "dangerous".

- In Part A, responses from six extra councils have been added. These largely reflect the comments made by the 67 councils that were reported in the interim report. Hence the findings in section 3 have not substantially changed.
- In Part B, the addition of 14 councils' responses has not changed the trends that were reported in the interim report. The main exceptions to this are:
 - In the interim report rural councils were reported as having a higher rate of dog rushing incidents, compared with urban councils, in 2001/2002. This rate is now the same for rural and urban councils.
 - The interim report noted that the number of visits to public hospitals from dog attacks remained relatively constant during 1995/1996 – 1999/2000. The new figures for the years 2000/2001 and 2001/2002 show an increase in hospitalisations resulting from dog attacks for these years. This increase can also be seen in the figures for these two years for the relative rates of dog bites for both children under 10 years of age, and males.
- Another change is the way in which reported dog attacks are attributed to cross-breed dogs. In this report, dog attacks attributed to cross-breeds have been separated out from those attributed to a "single breed".

Summary of Part A Findings

Dog Control Problems

- When asked about the general nature of problems experienced with dog control, councils frequently identified the following broad areas:
 - dog owners
 - difficulties with enforcement
 - legislative provisions
 - the courts.
- Dog Owners: The problem most frequently reported by councils with regard to owners was the failure to register dogs. A high proportion of respondents also cited dog owners' attitudes as a key part of the problem, and suggested solutions that focused on the need for educating owners about their responsibilities.
- Enforcement: Councils consistently identified the lack of any preventative power of entry and seizure as a major impediment to dealing with dog control problems, along with the inability of councils to seize unregistered dogs that are under the control of the owner or on private property. Comments regarding other enforcement problems illustrate frustration with the costs and length of the judicial process.
- Legislation: Councils' comments about the legislation centred on difficulties interpreting the Act. A number of respondents also identified a lack of powers to take proactive, preventative measures as a problem.

- Courts: Comments relating to the court systems generally expressed dissatisfaction with both delays in the process and the low penalties imposed.

Adequacy of the Current Dog Control Act 1996

- When asked about the adequacy of the current Dog Control Act in respect of different issues, councils:
 - considered that the Act provides adequate powers for:
 - ensuring all dogs are registered
 - enforcing breaches of the Act
 - punishing owners of dogs for breaches of the Act
 - preventing repetition of incidents involving the same dog
 - making bylaws for the control of dogs
 - were divided over whether or not the Act had adequate powers for:
 - identifying potentially dangerous dogs
 - preventing repetition of incidents involving the same owner
 - preventing dangerous dog incidents
 - seizing dangerous dogs.

Overview Part B Analysis

Total Numbers of Dogs

- 61 councils reported a total of 422,545 registered dogs in 2001/2002.
- Extrapolating this figure for the whole of New Zealand, using estimates of the reported ratio of dogs per person, gives a conservative estimated total of 500,000 dogs.
- The average reported number of registered dogs per 1,000 people increased from 1996/1997 to 2001/2002 (from 106 to 117 registered dogs per 1000 people). Most of this increase occurred from 1996/1997 to 1998/1999. A slight drop was recorded from 2000/2001 to 2001/2002, with 118 registered dogs per 1000 people recorded for 2000/2001 and 117 for 2001/2002.

Dog Attacks on People

- 58 councils reported a total of 3,020 dog attacks on people in 2001/2002.
- Extrapolating this figure gives a nation-wide estimate of 3,435 dog attacks on people for 2001/2002.
- This estimate is well below the number of recorded Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) claims relating to dog injuries, which was 8,677 in 2001/2002. It appears that not all attacks that result in an ACC claim are reported to councils.
- The total number of dog attacks reported to councils has declined since 1999/2000 (from 3,326 to 3,020).
- The number of attacks by dogs on people reported to councils in relation to both the number of people and the number of registered dogs appears to be trending downward since 1999/2000. In 1999/2000 the rate of reported dog attacks across New Zealand was 1.24 per 1,000 people (based on responses from 42 councils), compared with 0.87 per 1,000 people in 2001/2002 (based on responses from 58 councils).
- Information from the New Zealand Health Information Service (NZHIS) shows that the number of dog attacks requiring a visit to a public hospital has increased since 1999/2000. In 1999/2000 there were 349 visits to hospital as a result of dog attacks (excluding day patients), while in 2001/2002 this number was 420. The number of hospitalisations for dog bites gives an indication of the level of "serious" dog attacks nationally, and the figures suggest that the number of serious attacks is rising.
- 25 councils reported 376 attacks by unregistered dogs in 2001/2002, which was 46% of the total attacks reported by these councils. From the survey data it is estimated that around 6% of all dogs are unregistered. This indicates that unregistered dogs have a disproportionately high rate of attacks on people, relative to their numbers.

Characteristics of Dog Attack Victims

- Information supplied by the NZHIS indicates that in the seven years between 1995/1996 and 2001/2002 a total of 2,736 visits (including day patients) were made to public hospitals for treatment of dog bites. Of these visits:
 - 34% (943) were by children 0-10 years, and
 - 60% (1,652) were by males
- The figures for both of these groups are disproportionately high, relative to the figures for everyone.
- Information about when people hospitalised as a result of dog bites were discharged from public hospital over the 7 years from 1996/1997 to 2001/2002 indicates that the number of dog attacks peaks in the summer months of December to February. Over these seven years, 284 attacks occurred in the month of January, compared with 194 attacks in the month of July.

Expenditure on Dog Control

- 54 councils (representing 87% of the total population) provided data on their total expenditure for dog control in 2001/2002. Total expenditure on dog control by these 54 councils was \$19,793,726.
- Average expenditure on dog control appears to have increased over the 1997/1998 to 2001/2002 period. This increase occurs when the average is calculated per person and per registered dog.

Breeds of Dog Involved in Attacks on People¹

- 29 councils identified the breed of dogs involved in attacks on people in the period 1996/1997 to 2001/2002. Less than a fifth of all reported dog attacks on people included information about the breed of the dog(s). There is no standard procedure for identifying breeds and there is inconsistency in the terminology they used by councils to describe breeds. In addition to this, information about who assessed the breed was not collected by the survey. Because the information about the breeds of dogs is based on a small dataset, these results should be treated as indicative and not representative of all councils or all dog attacks.
- Of the attacks on people where councils reported a "breed" of dog, cross-breed dogs were the type of dog identified most commonly. The cross-breeds identified most commonly were relatively consistent over the years surveyed and were:
 - Labrador Crosses
 - Staffordshire Bull Terrier Crosses
 - German Shepherd Crosses
 - Bull Terrier Crosses.

¹ Refer Section 13 for comments as to the accuracy of breed information.

- When councils identified a single breed of dog, the most commonly identified breeds involved in attacks on people were relatively consistent over the years surveyed and were:
 - German Shepherds
 - Rottweilers
 - Bull Terriers
 - Labradors.

Probationary and Disqualified Owners Under the Dog Control Act 1996

- 41 councils (representing 58% of the total population) reported a total of 85 probationary dog owners (under the Dog Control Act 1996).
- 39 councils (representing 48% of the total population) reported a total of 15 disqualified dog owners (under the Dog Control Act 1996) in 2001/2002.

Dogs Classified as Dangerous Under the Dog Control Act 1996

- 52 councils (representing 74% of the total population) reported a total of 278 of dog classified as dangerous (under the Dog Control Act 1996) in 2001/2002/