

The Role of Research and Behaviour in Legislation and Community Attitudes

G.W. Jennens

ABSTRACT

The animal management debate involves considerable repeated discussions of recommendations that are unacceptable to many people. This nonacceptance may be due to the community having been either misinformed, or not informed at all of the necessity for such recommendations. Many factors have contributed to this including the failure of authorities to adequately research relevant issues; the promotion by some groups of an always positive animal/human relationship; the type of education provided to dog owners; and the activities of some special interest groups. Aspects of dog attacks on people and livestock, the seizure of dogs, dog owner education, reduced licence fees, the prosecution of dog owners and the breeding and recycling of dogs are used as examples of the consequences of these to effective animal management. Animal management strategists must research problems before drafting and implementing legislation, and ensure that a more balanced perspective of the animal/human relationship in the community is promoted. Behavioural management should be included in all educational and training programs for dogs, dog owners and special interest groups. Special interest groups must be required to carry out their legislative and administrative responsibilities and not be permitted to perpetuate problems by their activities. A better informed community will be more receptive to restrictions on pet ownership.

INTRODUCTION

Several recent studies have detailed the frequency and seriousness of problems caused by aggressive and/or uncontrolled dogs in Australia, and have stressed the need for effective animal management strategies (Podberscek & Blackshaw 1990, Thompson 1991, Jennens 1992, Murray 1992). In the popular press many articles have reported dog issues: attacks on both children and adults; calls for action by the public; suggestions by welfare, community and dog interest groups; and promises by local and state politicians to address, or at least look at the issues of concern.

But as Alan Beck, a leading authority on animal management, said in May 1974 at the National Conference on the Ecology of the Surplus Dog and Cat Problem in Chicago, "In 1919 controlling authorities were discussing registration, differential fees and leash laws, today we are here to do the same. Little has changed in 55 years." (Beck 1974). His words are equally applicable in 1992, 18 years later.

Historically the animal management debate has been fraught with issues requiring solutions that are politically, socially and financially unacceptable. Committee meetings and conferences in different locations over the last two to three decades have discussed these same issues, arrived at similar conclusions, and put forward the same recommendations. Frequently the input from special interest groups, and not objective research has "doggedly" provided the submissions for the debate. This has resulted in legislators having to grapple with compromises which do not offend or upset, but which also don't work.

Animal management is only acceptable to most people in the community if it does not restrict their right to own and dispose of animals, does not curtail breeding activities and is inexpensive to administer. Criticism of the Victorian Companion Animals Act as being anti-dog, setting a dangerous precedent and merely revenue gathering, are examples of these prevailing attitudes by some members of special interest groups.

These community attitudes, and the nonacceptance of legislation, have arisen partly because of the following reasons:

- Relevant animal management issues have not been adequately researched to gain information that may change these attitudes. Neither has the drafting and implementation of legislation always been based on the knowledge gained from objective research.
- Special interest groups have promoted a biased perspective of the animal-human relationship. The promotion of an always positive interaction has contributed to the prevailing lack of awareness in the community of the considerable risk to animals, and the costs to society when the relationship breaks down.
- Educational material and training programs are not always relevant and sufficiently informative to ensure an adequate understanding of the necessity for animal management by all in the community. In addition such programs frequently don't provide a dog owner with assistance to prevent or correct an individual problem.
- The objectives and behaviour of a few "professional" special interest groups are sometimes not compatible with animal management strategies, their service to the community is not always professional and other groups which have administrative and legislative obligations are not always fulfilling them.

RESEARCH AND ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

Previous research

During the 1960s and 70s researchers in the United States and Britain recognised the increasing seriousness of problems associated with uncontrolled dogs (Carding 1969, Beck 1973, Hummer 1973, Feldmann 1974). Studies of dog owner attitudes (Wilber 1976), the behavioural ecology of stray dogs (Beck 1973, Rubin & Beck 1982), pet population characteristics (Franti & Kraus 1974) and clinical evaluations of problem behaviours (Campbell 1974) soon identified the cause; too many dog owners were not willing or able to manage their pets.

Broad and specific management strategies were recommended by these and other researchers. Responsible pet ownership was to be encouraged (Schneider 1975, Loew 1979), along with appropriate pet selection (Joshua 1975) and sterilisation on adoption from a shelter (Phillips 1974). Dog obedience, and training people to manage their dog's behaviour was necessary (O'Donnell 1979, Robertson & Iverson 1979). The dog supply/demand imbalance had to be corrected, (Schneider 1975), the costs of control defrayed through registration (Phillips 1974), leash laws enforced (Carding 1975), and education programs developed (Pope 1974).

However for effective animal management strategies to have been developed from these recommendations, it was crucial that this research should have continued into the 1980s and been empirically tested and applied to address problems associated with uncontrolled dogs. Instead studies into animal management issues other than surveys of relevant groups virtually ceased from this period onwards. As a result it is no accident that today, in 1992, both the irresponsible owner and the type of education needed still have not been clearly defined. Nor is it fully understood why companion animals are abandoned and surrendered, where stray dogs come from, and under what circumstances dogs are dangerous.

It has taken until the 1990's for research to reject subsidised sterilisation schemes and multi-discount registration as costly and ineffective (Arkow 1991, Murray 1992). If this same research-free process is repeated in attempts to reduce dog attacks on people and other animals, then it will not only be costly and ineffective, but also potentially dangerous for future victims.

Legislation to reduce dog attacks

Identifying a dangerous dog

Every year in metropolitan Perth 5-6 000 people report to authorities that they have been threatened, bitten or chased by dogs in a public place. Several thousand more are attacked in private homes. Over 5 000 sheep and goats were killed by domestic dogs in seven outer metropolitan Perth councils between 1989 and 1991. Horses, cattle, poultry, wildlife, cats and small dogs also died after being attacked. More than 2 000 dogs caused serious injury to people or death to animals in these attacks during this period. Of those dogs caught attacking livestock, approximately 70% are now dead; they were surrendered to councils, destroyed by veterinarians or shot or baited by livestock owners (Jennens 1992). Dogs that caused serious injury to people were usually destroyed as well.

Most attacks were caused by dogs that, by their history, would not have been considered dangerous until after the serious incident had occurred. Any attack has the potential to cause serious injury and if such attacks are to be minimised, then the possibility of an attack occurring must be reduced. But without a behavioural profile and history of the dogs involved, an understanding of why they attacked and under what circumstances, this cannot be achieved. Preventive legislation must address these issues and not be only concerned with banning or confining dogs considered the most dangerous.

Breeds specific legislation

Breed specific legislation provides for a restriction on breeds of dogs considered dangerous to the public and other animals. Experiences in Britain and the United States show that there will always be major administrative problems with this type of legislation (Abend 1987):

- "Pit Bull" for example, is a generic term and can include a number of related breeds. Some owners in the United States now register their dogs with the Kennel Club as one of these similar breeds.
- Some breeds can be very diverse in colour and size. If a dog is unlicensed, looks similar to or is crossed with another breed, the owner can easily declare to the authorities that the dog is of another type. Identifying a dog as a member of a particular breed is not always possible unless it is originally registered as that breed.
- By its very nature, the legislation places restrictions on dogs of the banned breed that have no history of aggression and are well trained and supervised. Alternatively it places no restrictions on other breeds that are currently involved in most of the attacks on people and other animals. In addition individual dog owners have the ability to cause any dog they may own to become aggressive. Breeders themselves are able to genetically manipulate any breed of dog to increase the likelihood of it biting.

Dangerous breed lists

The rank ordering of dog breeds into lists based on the frequency of involvement in attacks can be misleading, especially if crossbred dogs are included with the pedigree breed they are most similar to genetically or in appearance. Recent research in Perth shows that a crossbred dog can behave like either of its parents, or like neither when attacking livestock. For example a German Shepherd/Kelpie cross could look like a Kelpie, be registered as a Kelpie, but may attack in a pattern characteristic of the German Shepherd breed. Different breeds, when attacking people, could also have a characteristic pattern of attack. A preoccupation with describing the breed of dog involved in an attack may overlook the necessity of evaluating the dog's behaviour and history, and the circumstances of the incident, to find out why the attack occurred.

Guard dogs

Overt aggression has rarely been a problem with professionally attack-trained dogs when strict controls are placed on the dogs, owners and trainers. Any dangerous dog legislation should contain an exemption for such dogs. It is the dogs owned by people who do not realise the effect of their actions on the dog, dogs poorly trained by non-professional trainers and dogs deliberately made vicious for security work that are involved in most attacks.

Many owners cause their dogs to be protective, territorial or dominant by simply failing to adequately socialise the dog and manage its behaviour. All breeds, sizes, and sexes of dogs have bitten because of these reasons, including some with the best pedigrees and with obedience titles.

Differences between attacks on people and attacks on other animals

Dogs that attack animals and those that attack people are usually considered in legislation to be equally dangerous to non-target species. Yet very few dogs that attack livestock are dangerous to people. The two behaviours, although having a similar expression, have different causes and require different correction procedures. For example relocating a dog from a semi rural area into the suburbs is a viable alternative for a dog that has attacked livestock. Most make perfectly good pets in every other way.

Dog attacks on people

Dog attacks on people result from many interacting factors. Dogs are not born aggressive, although some may be more likely to bite because of their breeding or sex. Most dogs bite people because they are frightened, dominant, protective or possessive. These behaviours can be prevented or controlled by responsible breeding, adequate socialisation, obedience training and careful management of the dog. Other causes of attacks on people include mishandling or abuse of the dog, a medical or physical condition and the victim's behaviour.

Predatory aggression

The domestic dog's predatory behaviour can be better understood by comparing it with the wild canid hunting sequence. This involves:

Orienting > Tracking > Trailing > Stalking > Chasing > Driving > Herding > Attacking > Killing > Consuming > Retrieving (Fox 1975)

All domestic dogs are able to perform some, if not all, of these behaviours. Several breeds have been specially bred for herding and retrieving, but this does not mean they are incapable of carrying out other parts of the sequence. Dogs are often unable to stop at herding, or fail to skip attacking and killing because stalking, chasing and driving facilitates the remainder of the sequence.

Treatment for a dog that chases and attacks livestock requires the dog to be caught whilst attacking, and punished immediately. This ensures that it forms the correct association with the behaviour. The dog must not be given the opportunity to attack again in the future. When used properly, the electronic dog training collar is the only effective means of training a dog not to attack another animal, or to correct a dog that has done so. Unfortunately its importation into Australia is banned.

Location of attacks

Most dog attacks on people occur in the dog owner's home or in close proximity to it (Wright 1985, Podberscek & Blackshaw 1990). Attacks on private property frequently happen when a dominant, protective or injured dog is not adequately supervised with children and visitors. Appropriate management by parents of both children and dogs can prevent many attacks because the dog posing the most danger to a family is often their own or a neighbour's.

Attacks in public places usually occur when a dog rushes out at passers-by. Many of these incidences could be prevented if fencing by-laws were adhered to. Western Australian legislation requires all dog owners to have an adequate means of confining the dog to their property, and they must sign a declaration to this effect when the dog is licensed. If dog owners do not comply, then the council may deregister or fail to register a dog, and seize it. Very few councils exercise this legislative right. If authorities are serious about preventing attacks then they must ensure that a "no fence no dog" rule is vigorously enforced with the onus on the property owner to ensure there is adequate fencing if a dog is kept.

Containment

Sometimes dangerous dog legislation provides an exemption to the building of an escape-proof enclosure if a dangerous dog is kept indoors. Many owners of such dogs would opt for this inexpensive alternative, which still allows the dog to interact with family members and visitors. Many attacks also occur when a child opens the front door to a visitor and the dog rushes outside.

Adequate confinement and enforcement is essential, but when any dog bites or attacks, the dog owner should also be required to take further precautions such as:

- Seeking treatment for the dog when this is available. Frequently a combination of behavioural modification, surgical intervention and drug therapy, in conjunction with training and careful management, will assist a biting problem.
- Completing an approved training and education program to ensure that he or she understands the dog's aggression, and is competent to control it.

Research and Legislation

It is important, and also safer for potential victims, that the information used when drafting legislation and designing education programs has been obtained from independent research. Special interest groups provide only selected information which may not always be sufficiently objective for these purposes. Longitudinal field research using investigative methods in addition to survey and incident report data, is necessary to understand the complexities of animal-human interactions.

ANIMAL-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP AND ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

Promoting a positive view of the relationship

By the early 1980s animal management research had been replaced by studies into the positive animal-human relationship and the benefits of pets to the welfare and health of people. Salmon and Salmon (1983) in a review of companion animal literature showed that only 12% of the 253 studies reviewed related to ecological or environmental pet control problems. Most related to the psychosocial role of pets in society (54%), and to pets in psychotherapy (19%).

The community was told that pets were good companions and helped people to cope with stress and physical illness (Brodie 1981, Faircloth 1981, Katcher 1983). Subsidised sterilisation schemes and pet facilitated therapy were part of this movement to assist people with their pets. However promoting the joys, benefits and usefulness of pets, without making people aware of the causes and consequences of the relationship breaking down, only created further problems for those involved in animal management. Phillips (1974) suggested that the surplus cat and dog problem was created by humane organisations encouraging the ownership of animals. Jones and Beck (1984) implied that positive attitudes towards dogs may lead to inadequate precautions being taken to prevent bites. This could be why parents often assume that children and dogs will always get along with each other, and are surprised when their own, a neighbour's or friend's dog bites a child.

Seizure of dogs

Promoting pets as an integral and necessary part of family life has also made it very difficult for authorities to remove a nuisance dog from its owner. Despite legislation in Western Australia to deregister and seize a dog if it is dangerous, if the owner has no means to contain the dog, or if a person repeatedly offends, the few attempts by councils to enforce this section of the Act have usually resulted in community outrage.

The community will accept breeders culling dogs, owners voluntarily surrendering their pets and thousands of dogs being abandoned and destroyed in shelters, but will not accept dogs being seized from unsuitable owners. As a result magistrates are reluctant to order the destruction of a dog, and most councils rarely deregister and seize dogs, often forbidding their staff to shoot a stray dog in a public place. This means that a minority of persistent offenders take up a disproportionate amount of enforcement resources and still continue to escape penalty.

Promoting a balanced view

Animal management authorities must ensure that the public has a balanced, objective and realistic view of the animal/human relationship. The community must be made aware that there are many deviants, people with personality disorders, and some old and infirm people who are not able mentally, physically or socially to look after a pet. It is sometimes in the best interest of the pet and/or society that the animal is removed from them, and that they are prevented from obtaining another one. Disqualification from ownership must be an integral part of companion animal legislation in order to protect dogs "at risk" from their owners, and the community from nuisance and dangerous dogs that are not controlled. At least part of the funding for this type of community awareness program should come from pet food companies and breed clubs who presently spend thousands of dollars per year on promotions like "pet of the year", and on trophies for beautiful dogs. This helps to fuel the demand for pets by exclusively promoting their positive roles in people's lives. Co-operation by groups such as "professional" breeders in animal management issues is an important prerequisite to an active and collective campaign to reduce the supply of pets from other sources such as backyard breeders, pet shops and poorly managed shelters.

EDUCATION OF DOG OWNERS AND ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

Irresponsible dog owners

"Irresponsible owners" is a vague and meaningless term as it never clearly defines just who an irresponsible dog owner is. As a result few pet owners are able to identify themselves as being one.

Persistent and totally irresponsible offenders are a minority. Most dog owners are careless, apathetic or uninformed, and are able to manage most other aspects of their daily lives within legislative constraints. They don't see themselves as irresponsible, but as being unfortunate to own a bad or stupid dog, or unlucky or victimised if they are cautioned or fined (Jennens 1992). They hold this view because responsibility has been traditionally equated with health, welfare, housing, grooming and formal obedience training, and not with socialisation, behavioural management and control. Most owners will carry out their care and welfare responsibilities by feeding, watering, exercising and housing their dog, and taking it regularly to the veterinarian. They do not neglect or abuse the dog, and many genuinely believe it is beneficial for a dog to be able to carry out all its natural behaviours. However it is the social and behavioural responsibilities that are of concern to animal management strategists, and there is an urgent need for the dog owner to be made aware of what these are and how to carry them out.

Defining education

"Dog owners must be educated" is the catch cry of many people debating animal management issues. But authorities have been able to avoid implementing education programs because the type of education dog owners and the community need is also not always clearly defined. Dog owner education may include creating an awareness of:

- dog associated problems
- the legal obligations of pet ownership
- the care and welfare requirements of a dog
- the costs involved in keeping a dog
- the benefits and availability of sterilisation
- the importance of selecting the appropriate breed, sex or age of a dog.

These are all important components of education programs, but if dogs were not permitted to engage inappropriately in normal behaviours such as wandering, biting, copulating and barking there would be no need for animal management strategies.

Behavioural management

Most legislation assumes that people are able to manage their dog's behaviour within the constraints of the law, and as a result there are few requirements on dog owners to demonstrate that they are able to do so. If an owner cannot put the dog on a leash and walk it down the street, leash laws will be difficult to enforce. Or if a habitual wandering dog is unable to be restrained by its owner or is restrained in a manner likely to cause a barking problem, then nuisance complaints will not be reduced. In the private home biting problems may develop when a new baby arrives or if a spouse leaves home, because people do not realise that problems such as these may develop when the dog's routine changes or it receives less attention.

Therefore it is crucial to include a behavioural management program in all animal management strategies. Such a program is currently being trialed in Nedlands City Council, Perth. A similar concept is being evaluated in Tee Tree Gully Shire, Adelaide with the support of the Department of Environment and Planning.

The Nedlands City Behavioural Management Program

This program has several interrelated components:

- A "Living With Your Dog" course which covers most facets of dog ownership over six, two hourly sessions.

LIVING WITH YOUR DOG

Week 1 Introduction, Selecting your dog, Socialisation

Week 2 Health, Nutrition, Emergency Care

Week 3 Handling and Grooming, Welfare

Week 4 Communication, Training

Week 5 Legal Responsibilities, Behaviour and the Law

Week 6 Behavioural problems, Overview

A similar program for cat owners is being developed.

- A dog owner's handbook. A 44 page booklet, Your Dog's Behaviour and the Law in Western Australia, was co-authored by the Nedlands City Council's Senior Ranger, privately funded and circulated to all Western Australian councils. Copies of the handbook have been purchased by Nedlands City Council and given to all dog owners when their dog is initially licensed, or upon the renewal of an existing licence.
- A six-lesson dog obedience course has commenced in conjunction with a local veterinarian and a dog trainer.
- Short seminars on problem behaviours are being proposed.
- A dog exercise and fitness park containing agility equipment has been approved in principal by the council.
- An active school visiting program is carried out by the senior ranger.
- Dogs with serious behavioural problems or offenders having court action taken against them may be referred to a behavioural consultant for an assessment of the dog. A report on the dog is then forwarded to council for presentation in court.

Nedlands is an example of a council providing a balance between education and assistance for those who are prepared to learn or rectify a problem, and enforcement action against those who are not. The council will readily prosecute offences in court if warranted, and implement deregistration and seizure procedures if necessary. Although co-operation with outside expertise is actively sought, the program has been made possible by councillors and senior administrative staff supporting new initiatives demonstrated by the council's senior ranger. Five similar programs are now being proposed in 1993 for implementation in other council districts.

Advantages of the behavioural management program are:

- Information and assistance is geographically localised, and directly related to an owner's individual problem.
- Advice can be obtained not only on dog behaviour but also on the health, welfare and training of the dog, and on the owner's legal responsibilities.
- Costs to local and state authorities are minimal as user-pays and local sponsorship are an integral part of the program. However, its multi-component concept means that aspects of it are affordable to all dog owners. Discounts from local pet suppliers will be used in the future as an incentive for dog owners to complete the "Living With Your Dog" course.
- The information conveyed is objective, informative and taught by appropriately qualified people.

The benefits to Nedlands Council from the program are already apparent by the positive reaction from ratepayers who now have a local support network to deal with their dog associated problems.

Nedlands Council has assisted with administrative and financial support for the pilot program. Its future now depends on other councils and special interest groups promoting and supporting similar programs. To date the response has been varied. The handbook is available in 80 councils, 50 veterinary clinics and through the RSPCA. It is regrettable however, that dog training groups, breed clubs and animal shelters have shown little interest in this and other aspects of the program. Perhaps it may be necessary to offer financial incentives to encourage these groups to participate.

Training of special interest groups

A behavioural management program must also include training in dog behaviour for those groups involved in handling dogs and advising dog owners.

Currently no expertise is required to become a "professional" breeder. People do so by merely joining the Canine Control Council or a breed club, yet they control the type and temperament of many dogs entering into the community. Shelter workers usually volunteer for positions out of a love and concern for animals, yet they are responsible for assessing which dogs are suitable for recycling. Animal Control Officers are trained to enforce the legal constraints on a dog's behaviour, but receive little or no training on how the dog owner should do this. Trainers in dog obedience clubs do not always have the experience and expertise to deal with common problems their members have outside of club grounds. Veterinarians are competent in animal health and care but receive little training in dog behaviour, yet dog owners seek and expect expert advice on training and behavioural problems from them.

Given the relevance of behaviour to animal management problems, it is crucial that local and state politicians and administrators gain an appreciation of its importance independently, before designing and implementing legislation. Submissions from the controlling bodies of the above mentioned groups are usually unfortunately limited to their own areas of concern: producing, welfare, recycling, legal responsibilities, training and health.

Collective responsibility

All groups involved with dogs and their owners have a collective responsibility for behavioural management, because poor management by dog owners will negatively affect the areas they are primarily concerned with. If suitable training cannot or will not be provided to staff or members, then dog owners these groups have contact with should be supplied with relevant information on dog behaviour or be referred to an appropriate specialist if a problem is serious. For example "professional" breeders should provide to buyers of their pups informative educational material on the training and management of their dog breed. Veterinarians should be involving their nursing staff in advising clients on how to recognise the early signs of problem behaviours. Early intervention can prevent later and more serious problems from occurring.

Quality of education material

It is equally important that the education material provided is accurate, informative and relevant to behavioural management. Those groups supplying misleading or inaccurate information must be singled out, and the information discredited.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS AND ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

Contributions to animal management problems

Two serious problems that animal management strategists need to address are:

- the failure of some local authorities and courts to carry out their administrative and legislative obligations;
- the perpetuation of animal management problems by some individuals of "professional" special interest groups.

Local authorities and courts

Calls for tougher legislation and heavier penalties are academic unless the current milder legislation is being enforced to the degree that it was intended, and appropriate penalties are given to offenders.

A survey of 121 local authority officers responsible for dog control found that there are several internal and external constraints that make it difficult for them to carry out some of their duties.

Internal constraints

- The local authority's inconsistent or lenient policy. Many councils are reluctant to prosecute their ratepayers, preferring to warn the dog owner, fine them for a minor related offence, or seek the destruction of the dog.
- Councillor or administrative interference in the legislative process.
- A lack of basic equipment such as a catching pole, traps and protective clothing needed to catch and handle difficult dogs.
- Many councils don't have sufficient staff to investigate each and every dog complaint. Council rangers can also be responsible for parking, bush fire control, security, litter control and delivery duties. They are often not adequately remunerated nor provided with an attractive career structure within individual municipalities.

External constraints

- Sections of the legislation, such as that concerning dog attacks are too ambiguous to be enforced. For example, if a dog owner has adequate fencing and states that the dog was let out by persons unknown after they had checked the gates, then they have a defence if the dog is involved in an attack. They are deemed to have taken all reasonable precautions to secure the dog.
- Councils may not prosecute because of insufficient and conflicting evidence provided by the victim or a witness. The dog may not be able to be identified, or the location of its home may be found to be incorrect after investigations have been carried out.
- Many complainants and witnesses are reluctant to attend court or pursue civil action. Instead they request only to have the offender warned, their expenses reimbursed, or the dog destroyed if the offence is serious.
- The council's prosecution costs cannot always be recovered from the penalties and court costs imposed on the offender. Promoting a maximum fine of \$1 000 for a dog attack on a person is not a deterrent if less than 5% of offenders are prosecuted, and the average fine imposed by the courts is \$100 - \$150.

Registration and identification offences

Without concise legislation and the support of the courts and complainants, councils cannot always carry out their legal and administrative duties. As already outlined, failure to enforce the legislation is not always the fault of councils, but a soft approach to administrative offences such as registration and identification is difficult to understand. Both are fundamental to obtaining and owning a dog. Fees should be sufficient to fund dog control and a compulsory permanent means of identification introduced. Appropriate penal action should be taken, without a warning given, against those who do not comply. Too much debate and time has been taken up with registration and identification, how much owners should pay and whether discs, tattoos or the microchip should be used. Not enough debate and action has been afforded to the more serious animal management problems such as wandering or the constraints to enforcement.

In Western Australia dog registration fees are \$20 per year for an unsterilised dog and \$5 for a sterilised dog. These fees are far too low to adequately fund dog control, or to be economically collected if not paid when due. Fees are unlikely to be increased significantly in the near future. As a consequence, registration is as low as 30%-40% in some councils. Yet despite the high administrative costs incurred as a result of unregistered and unidentified dogs, most councils issue a seven day warning for having an unregistered dog, and fail to infringe a dog owner whose dog is not wearing a collar and tag.

Other special interest groups

Canine control council members

As a result of the dog's role in society or their owners' circumstances, many categories of dog owners apply for and receive reduced registration fees. Canine Control Councils have repeatedly sought and sometimes gained reduced fees for their members, based on a belief that being a member of that organisation equates with being a more responsible dog owner than other dog owners in the community. However, an analysis of any council complaint or behavioural clinic records will show that Canine Control Council members are generally no better at managing their dogs' behaviour, nor is having a pedigree dog any reason to believe it is less likely to bite than a crossbred.

"Professional breeders"

Reduced registration fees should not be given to "professional breeders" in an organisation whose preferred practices are counter-productive to reducing serious animal management problems, such as dog attacks on people.

Questionable breeding and management practises that perpetuate animal management problems include:

- Breeding to a physical and not a behavioural standard. Shy and aggressive dogs are often bred from because of their fashionable lines and good conformation, and then sold as pets to unsuspecting owners.
- Non-sterilisation of surplus breeding stock.
- The sale of aged, poorly socialised kennelled dogs and bitches.
- The sale of pups at the most economical and not the most behaviourally suitable time.
- The breeding of thousands of the guarding type breeds that are responsible for many attacks on people, and failing to provide information and assistance on preventing and managing this problem.

Many authors have questioned the dubious genetic manipulations of breeders and the proliferation of hereditary diseases in pedigree dogs (Wolfensohn 1981, Willis 1991). The public should also be made aware of the negative behavioural consequences of some of these practices.

Although crossbred dogs are prominent in public bite statistics, this reflects their numbers in the population and the level of care and supervision they are given, and not the typical behavioural profile of the crossbreed. In private homes pedigree dogs are responsible for as many attacks on people as crossbreeds (Wright 1991). It could be that this is caused by promoting dominant characteristics in such dogs as a result of standards set for the show ring.

Constraints on breeding

Although poorly supervised pets have been identified as the main cause of animal management problems, a preoccupation with this cause and with sterilisation has overlooked the contribution made by those who supply dogs into the community. The number of dogs entering the community needs to be reduced as part of an overall management strategy. This will not be achieved until it is made more difficult and expensive for breeders to produce and supply dogs; both backyard and "professional" breeders. Currently any person in Western Australia can breed as many dogs as they like, as often as they like and whatever type of dog they like, and take no responsibility for the social and legal problems resulting from their actions. The pending Victorian Companion Animals Act provides some constraints on breeding, but as outlined in the previous section there are serious behavioural concerns with allowing favourable breeding rights to registered pedigree breeders.

All breeders should be treated equally in legislation. No person should be allowed to keep more than two dogs including the young of those dogs, nor breed from any dog without a suitable premises for breeding and a licence to do so. A levy should be imposed on every pup produced, and this revenue used to partially fund animal management and education programs, and the euthanasia of surplus dogs.

But it is not only "professional breeders" whose actions may be at cross purposes with animal management strategies.

The welfare dilemma

When domestic dogs attack farm and companion animals, most welfare groups have difficulty in deciding whether to protect the dogs from the control techniques used by man, or the animals from being attacked by the dogs. More livestock owners are warned or prosecuted by welfare authorities for wounding a dog than dog owners are for owning dogs that attack livestock. As a result predation by domestic dogs on farm animals rarely brings a strong public condemnation or invites active participation by welfare groups, despite the suffering caused to the animals attacked. If animal welfare groups continue to oppose and/or deny access to many of the methods available to prevent and control livestock attacks, such as the electronic dog training collar and leg traps/snares, then they must become more actively involved in preventing the attacks from occurring.

Recycling of dogs

There must be more controls put on the recycling of dogs into the community, and animal shelters should be required to meet high standards, such as those attained by the Lost Dogs Home in Melbourne. Unfortunately much of the recycling in Western Australia is still controlled by well meaning people who feel sorry for the dog that has been abandoned or neglected. They do not always consider the effects of this trauma on the dog's later behaviour. Major upheavals and multiple homes during a dog's first 12 months of life can lay the foundation for many later behavioural problems that are not present at time of purchase. Simply giving the dog a new home and identity will not always correct a problem. Some shelters are more concerned with the suitability of a prospective owner than the effect the dog's behaviour will have on the relationship.

- A more stringent assessment of the behaviour of each dog is needed, especially those of an unknown origin, so that only the most suitable are placed and the remainder culled.
- The number of sources that prospective owners can obtain recycled dogs from should be reduced. Private sales should include a written history of the dog detailing any problem behaviours.

Dog obedience clubs

Dog obedience clubs must become more flexible in their training programs and work towards reducing their trainer/pupil ratios. Many clubs are, unfortunately, more concerned with the rules and regulations of trialing than basic dog training and behavioural management.

Federal and State Government

Federal and state governments need to ensure that the drafting of any legislation to address animal management issues is done after the problems of concern have been adequately researched. In addition, the legislation must be able to be clearly understood by all of those to whom it is directed, and can be enforced by those who have to enforce it. It is hoped that the same administrative and enforcement problems will not be repeated with cat legislation. Before cat legislation is drafted, research must be carried out into the predatory and exploratory behaviour of the cat, and education programs implemented to ensure that cat owners can re-educate their cats to confinement, or a diurnal lifestyle.

Media Responsibility

Animal management issues need to be accurately and responsibly reported by the media. For example not every sheep is killed by "packs of wild and savage dogs", nor are all Pit Bull Terriers "mobile fighting machines". By describing dogs in these terms the media makes it very difficult to convince dog owners that the family pet can attack livestock, or convince people that a neighbour's Pit Bull Terrier is not a danger to them just because it is a Pit Bull Terrier.

An overall professional standard

If community problems associated with dogs are to be reduced, special interest groups must maintain a professional standard of practice and service compatible with animal management strategy. Without a minimum professional standard that can be used as an example, the community will have difficulty accepting selective sanctions against backyard breeders, dogs recycled from private homes, and unprofessional trainers.

Victim management

Adequate provisions for victims should be incorporated into animal management and education programs. For example, potential victims of dog attacks should be taught bite avoidance techniques. Information on the appropriate human behaviour towards dogs should be a part of all pet education in schools (Borchelt, Lockwood, Beck & Voith 1983, Wright 1991), and be included in the training of those in occupations where the risk of receiving a dog bite is high. Parents also need to be informed of situations and circumstances where children are likely to be bitten, and be given advice on how to avoid them. Counselling should be made available to victims of dog bites through hospitals and medical practitioners. The psychological trauma resulting from a dog bite is often underestimated. People can remain frightened of dogs for the rest of their lives, and pass these fears on to their children.

Victims and witnesses must be encouraged to report any incident of concern involving a dog to the relevant authority, so that the dog owner can be advised and requested to take appropriate action. In many dog attacks and nuisance complaints there has been a previous unreported minor incident. A reliable dog bite reporting system that is inclusive of local authorities, doctors, veterinarians, hospitals and police, needs to be established. Currently statistics collected by these groups are collated and published independently.

SUMMARY

Four of the many constraints to effective animal management have been identified in this paper: the failure to carry out adequate research; the promotion of an always positive animal-human relationship; the type of education; and the activities of special interest groups. The consequences of each as it relates to different animal management issues has been discussed, with possible solutions suggested. More longitudinal field research, a more balanced view of the animal-human relationship, behavioural management programs, and the monitoring of special interest groups are some of these suggestions.

Independent and objective research is a necessary prerequisite to reducing the seriousness and frequency of animal management problems. For example research has shown that measures introduced to prevent dog attacks and overpopulation aimed at the dog alone, such as banning breeds, declaring a few dogs dangerous and sterilisation are likely to be ineffective on their own. This is because to control population numbers it is necessary to have an understanding of the dog's sexual behaviour, and to reduce biting an understanding the dog's aggression is needed. Behavioural research provides this knowledge and also the techniques to manage these behaviours. Animal management problems could be substantially reduced if dog owners were made aware of these and motivated or coerced to apply them.

Training, management and supervision of the dog owner and special interest groups is also necessary to ensure their activities are compatible with animal management strategies. Why councils won't enforce, or breeders won't stop breeding can be explained by political, financial and emotional reasons, but not always excused. These reasons are preventing many solutions from being implemented. Irresponsible owners, unsupervised pets and an overpopulation of dogs have been identified as the main causes of animal management problems. Yet authorities continue to allow repeat offenders to keep their dogs, dogs to be kept on properties without fences, and the unrestricted breeding and recycling of dogs. The community still tolerates people involved with dogs denying that the animal-human relationship can be negative, when thousands of people are being bitten each year. This attitude has resulted in many difficulties for enforcement authorities, and has caused many owners to be surprised by behaviours in their dog they were not informed were possible. Animal management is a shared responsibility, and it must be ensured that all dog interest and community groups are sharing in it and resolving areas of conflict.

Reluctance by the community to address these human factors is evident by arguments put forward against economically viable and practicable solutions to animal management problems; licence fees should not be increased because people won't licence their dog; too many constraints on dog ownership would result in more animals being abandoned and affect a person's right to have a dog; or education programs would not be effective because only responsible owners would participate. Yet none of these arguments has ever been adequately researched to support or refute these opinions.

Research that identifies the human contributions to animal management problems should not be discouraged or ignored. There will always be issues needing decisions that are difficult for many in the community to accept. Research can provide a scientific base upon which the community can decide whether the solutions are less acceptable than the problem itself.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Roberts Research Grant, the School of Veterinary Studies Murdoch University and the Agriculture Protection Board for funding this research. A special thanks to Professor W.T. Clark of Murdoch University and Senior Ranger Graeme Raine of the City of Nedlands, Perth for their contributions to this paper. I would also like to acknowledge the Western Australian Municipal Law Enforcement Officers, livestock owners and dog owners, who provided the information for the research.

REFERENCES

- Abend, P. (1987). For Pit Bulls only. *Animals*, Oct/Sept, pp 5-9.
- Arkow, P. (1985). Animal Control Laws and Enforcement. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. Vol. 198 (7), pp 1164-1171.
- Beck, A.M. (1973). *The Ecology of Stray Dogs. A Study of Free Ranging Urban Animals*. Baltimore, York Press.
- Beck, A.M. (1974). Ecology of Unwanted and Uncontrolled Pets. In *Proceedings of the National Conference on the Ecology of the Surplus Dog and Cat Problem*. pp 31-39. Chicago.
- Borchelt, P.L. (1983). Aggressive behaviour of dogs kept as companion animals: Classification and influence of sex, reproductive status and breed. *Applied Animal Ethology*. Vol. 10, pp 45-61.
- Borchelt, P.L., Lockwood, R., Beck, A.M., & Voith, V.L. (1983). Dog Attacks Involving Predation on Humans. In Katcher, A.H. & Beck, A.M (eds) *New Perspectives on Our Lives with Companion Animals*. pp 219-231 Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Brodie, J.D. (1981). Health Benefits From Owning Pet Animals. *Veterinary Record*. Vol. 109 (10), pp 197-199.
- Campbell, W.E. (1974). Why Do Dogs Bite? *Modern Veterinary Practice*. Vol. 2, pp 97-103.
- Carding, A.H. (1969). The Significance and Dynamics of Stray Dog Populations with Special Reference to the U.K. and Japan. *Journal of Small Animal Practice*. Vol. 10, pp 419-446.
- Carding, A.H. (1975). The Growth of Pet Population in Western Europe, and Its Implications for Dog Control in Great Britain. In Anderson, R.S. (ed). *Pet Animals and Society*, pp 66-88. London: Bailliere Tindall.
- Faircloth, J.C. (1981). The Emotional Importance of Pets. *Veterinary Economics*. Vol. 22 (11), pp 44-45.
- Feldmann, B.M. (1974). Problem of Urban Dogs. *Science*. Vol. 185, p 903.
- Franti, C.E. & Kraus, J.F. (1974). Aspects of Pet Ownership in Yolo County California. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. Vol. 164 (2), pp 166-168.
- Fox, M.W. (1978). *The Dog: Its Domestication and Behaviour*. New York. Garland, STPM Press.
- Hummer, R.L. (1975). Pets in Today's Society. *American Journal of Public Health*. Vol. 65, pp 1095-1098.
- Jennens, G.W. (1992). In Press.
- Jones, B.A. & Beck, A.M. (1984). Unreported Dog Bites and Attitudes Toward Dogs. In Anderson, R.K., Hart, B.L., and Hart, L.A. *The Pet Connection: Its Influence on Our Health and Quality of Life*. pp 355-363. South St. Paul. Globe Publishing Co.
- Joshua, J.O. (1975). Responsible Pet Ownership. In Anderson, R.S (ed) *Pet Animals and Society*. pp 129-138. London: Bailliere Tindall
- Katcher, A.H. (1983). Are Companion Animals Good For Your Health? A Review of the Evidence. In *Proceedings of*

the Second Canadian Symposium on Pets and Society. pp 29-59. Vancouver, Toronto.

Loew, F.M. (1979). Why Are We Here? In Proceedings of the Second Canadian Symposium on Pets and Society. pp 9-11. Vancouver, Toronto.

Murray, R.W. (1992). Unwanted Pets and Subsidised Pet Neuter Schemes Australian Veterinary Practice. Vol. 22 (1), pp 12-18.

O'Donnell, D. (1979). Dog Obedience Training as a Means Toward Pet Population Control. In Proceedings of the Second Canadian Symposium on Pets and Society. pp 53-55. Vancouver, Toronto.

Phillips, R.T. (1974). Problems of Euthanasia and Adoption. In Proceedings of the National Conference on the Ecology of the Surplus Dog and Cat Problem. pp 49-58. Chicago.

Podberscek, A.L. & Blackshaw, J.K. (1990). Dog Bites: Why, when and where? Australian Veterinary Practitioner. Vol. 20 (4), pp 182-187.

Pope, C. (1974). Public Education. In Proceedings of the National Conference on the Ecology of the Surplus Dog and Cat Problem. pp 103-108. Chicago.

Robertson, A.K. & Iverson, J.O. (1979). Why Do Dogs Bite? An Epidemiological Approach. In Proceedings of the Second Canadian Symposium on Pets and Society. pp 75-81. Vancouver, Toronto

Rubin, H.D. & Beck, A.M. (1982). Ecological Behaviour of Free-Ranging Urban Dogs. Applied Animal Ecology. Vol. 8, pp 161-168.

Salmon, P.W. & Salmon, I.M. (1983). Who owns who? In Katcher, A.H. & Beck, A.M. (eds) New Perspectives on Our Lives with Companion Animals. pp 254-265. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Schneider, R. (1975). Observations on Overpopulation of Dogs and Cats. Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association. Vol. 167 (4), pp 281-284

Thompson, P. (1991). Dog attacks. Injury Surveillance Monthly Bulletin. Vol. 29, 1-2. Adelaide, South Australian Health Commission.

Wilber, P. (1976). Pets, Pet Ownership, and Animal Control: Social and Psychological Attitudes. In Proceedings of the National Conference on Dog and Cat Control. pp 150-161. Denver, Colorado: American Human Association.

Willis, M.B. (1989). Control of Inherited Defects in Dogs. Journal of Small Animal Practice. Vol. 30, pp 188-192.

Wolfensohn, S. (1981). The Things We Do to Dogs. New Scientist. Vol. 90, pp 404-407.

Wright, J.C. (1985). Severe attacks by dogs: Characteristics of the dogs, the victims, and the attack settings. Public Health Rep. Vol. 100 pp 55 -6

Wright, J.C. (1991). Canine Aggression Towards People: Bite Scenarios and Prevention. Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice. Vol. 21 (2), pp 299-314.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Garth Jennens MSocSci
School of Veterinary Studies
Murdoch University
Murdoch
PERTH AUSTRALIA 6150
Ph (09)360 2517
Fax (09)310 4144

In the late 1970's I fostered a developing interest in animal behaviour by studying Psychology and Zoology at Waikato University in Hamilton, New Zealand. With the Behaviour Unit at Ruakura Research Centre nearby I was able to gain research experience in the behaviour and welfare of domestic and companion animals.

A research assignment to study the behavioural ecology of wandering dogs led to further research into animal management issues such as dog attacks on people and other animals.

Doctoral research at Murdoch University in Perth enabled me to combine both these areas of interest into one project. I am currently completing this research into dog attacks on livestock, whilst working privately as an Animal Behaviour Consultant. My other research interests include the ecology of the domestic cat, behavioural aspects of performance in thoroughbred horses, and why the animal-human relationship breaks down.

I see the need for longitudinal field research and behavioural management programs to become an integral part of animal management strategies if problems are to be reduced.

[UAM 92 Index Page](#)

