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Hands off our pets

160 dog-lovers rally against pit-bull law

By Monica Heary

ABOUT 150 dog owners paraded last Sunday with their pooches, including six pit-bull terriers, at Parramatta Park. They were protesting against proposed state laws to ban pit bulls and four other dog breeds. In Parramatta, there are 12,225 microchipped dogs, 28 restricted dogs and 50 dangerous dogs, the dangerous dogs being those that have attacked people, or even cats. In Holroyd, the 2604 registered dogs aged six months or more include 59 pit-bull terriers. The legislation comes in the wake of two pit-bull attacks earlier this month. Fifty to 60 protesters with dogs on leashes completed a 3 kilometre walk around the park. The president of the American Staffordshire Terrier Club of NSW, Stephanie Johansson, staged the "punish the deed, not the breed" protest. The president of the 12,500-strong Royal NSW Canine Club Keith Irwin said that his club "didn't recognise" pit-bull terriers as a breed. "The biggest problem today with dog ownership is the owner," Mr Irwin said. He said that the proposal to make it an offence to breed, sell, give away or acquire five different breeds, including pit-bull terriers, was "just revolting". The proposed laws cover pit-bull terriers, American pit bulls, Japanese tosas, Argentinian fighting dogs and Brazilian fighting dogs. These dogs are currently prohibited from being imported into Australia. After the introduction of the new laws, owners of restricted breeds would have to have their dogs desexed, effectively breeding the dogs out of existence. There are 3500 dogs of restricted breeds registered in NSW, of which the majority are American pit bulls and pit-bull terriers. The Government would give councils the power to ban restricted dogs and would work with councils to identify dangerous and restricted dogs every four months. A \$110 on-the-spot fine is imposed if a person has an unregistered dog. **Dogged:** Right: Iahnia Coleiro, 2%, trusts her American Staffordshire terrier Couta, also 2%. **Top:** Protesters say: "Punish the deed, not the breed." **Pictures:** Kieren Tilly



Walk Against BSL

Dog lovers and breeders from all over NSW rallied at Parramatta Park on Sunday 22 May. The friendly protest was staged by the American Staffordshire Terrier Club of NSW Inc to raise public awareness about Breed Specific Legislation (BSL).

Stephanie Johansson, President of The American Staffordshire Terrier Club of NSW states "I feel the NSW Government is proposing legislation that will be impossible to enforce and also will be ineffective at protecting people from dangerous dogs. BSL doesn't work because it only targets aggressive dogs of a particular breed. It ignores aggressive dogs of other breeds and also ignores aggressive crossbreed dogs. Since aggression can occur in any breed and also any crossbreed, to be effective at reducing bite incidents, you must target aggression in ALL breeds and crossbreeds. As over 40% of dogs in NSW are crossbreeds, this must be taken into consideration."

The slogan used by many people opposing BSL is "Punish the deed, not the breed". This means punish the owners of individual aggressive dogs and increase penalties for those who encourage aggressive behaviour. By blanket banning whole breeds, thousands of innocent pets and their owners will be punished. The implementation aggressive dog control legislation is much simpler, less costly and more effective than administering BSL.

The NSW Government commissioned a report to investigate the issues surround BSL and the control of aggressive dogs. The report was submitted by Dr Kersti Seksel in July 2002. This report came to the conclusion that BSL is ineffective. Dr Seksel researched other countries that have implemented this type of legislation, and found that none of them had a significant reduction in dog bite incidents. This report can be viewed at http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/Information/ca_breed_specific_legislation.pdf

Through the Companion Animals Act, we have sound non-discriminatory legislation in place. Part of the problem is that it is not being enforced. There are a number of recommendations in Dr Seksel's report, which would greatly improve public knowledge and in turn reduce bite incidents. These include encouraging dog training and socialisation classes, and school based education for children. Additionally, public education would improve compliance levels of the existing regulations.

Another concern for lovers of American Staffordshire Terriers is the continual misrepresentation of the breed by mainstream media. It has been stated by misinformed people that American Staffordshire Terriers, also know as amstaffs, are the same as pitbulls. This is simply not true. They do share a common ancestry, but so do many other breeds, this is part of breed evolution. American Staffordshire Terriers are a recognised breed in their own right, with a documented history spanning over a century.

If BSL were introduced, it would then be easy for government to add additional breeds to the ban. What about Rottweilers, German Shepherds, Mastiffs, Ridgebacks, Cattle Dogs, Collies, Boxers, Bulldogs, Dobermans, the list goes on. There are thousands of well cared for friendly pets of all these breeds in NSW, who would potentially be affected by the proposed laws. People would be losing their democratic right of free choice. All these breeds and more will be represented at the rally on Sunday. We all oppose BSL at its most basic level, IT DOESN'T WORK. Plus it is a restriction of our democratic right to choose what breed of dog we want.

For further details or additional background information, please contact
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