

Prevention of dog attacks in public places. A local government strategy adopted by 11 Victorian Councils

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INTRODUCTION

A surprising number of people can recall being threatened by an aggressive dog in a public place at least once during their lives. Dog attacks in public places are an issue for all Councils, attracting substantial public concern, media attention, and demanding a considerable proportion of Animal Management Officer time. Councils are responsible for implementing legislation to control dogs in public places, and therefore play an important role in preventing attacks in the community.

This paper identifies the factors involved in dog attacks in public places by presenting the results of a 1997-1999 dog attack survey, and considers a number of strategies Councils can utilise to address the problem. In particular, the activities of eleven Victorian Councils (Banyule, Bendigo, Boroondara, Frankston, Knox, Loddon, Manningham, Moorabool, Moreland, Nillumbik and Port Phillip) who recently undertook a comprehensive dog attack prevention campaign are discussed, along with the results and future implications of their work.

WHY THE FOCUS ON DOG ATTACKS IN PUBLIC PLACES?

A number of different factors are involved in dog attacks in public places compared to attacks in private homes (these are discussed in more detail in the next section). Research by the Monash University Accident Research Centre (Ashby, 1996), shows 280 Victorians are hospitalised each year due to dog bites. 81% of dog attacks causing hospitalisation occur in private homes, and 43% of these incidents involved children under five years old. In comparison, only around 19% of dog attacks in public places resulted in hospitalisation of human victims (Ashby, 1996).

Given that dog attacks in private homes cause the most serious injuries to victims, and victims are often children bitten by their own dog or a dog known to them (Ashby, 1996), strategies to prevent dog attacks in private homes are of key importance. Subsequently, the majority of State Government funding for dog attack prevention education and activities are currently focused in this area (as discussed at the end of this paper).

However, there is also significant pressure on Government to address the issue of dog attacks in public places. The majority of dog aggression incidents in public places are reported to local Councils (as opposed to attacks in private homes, which are usually recorded only by the hospitals treating the victims).¹ While most dog aggression incidents in public places result in minor or no physical injuries to human victims (with many minor injuries being treated by General

Practitioners), their sheer frequency is enough to cause public concern. Last year, around 3,500 dog attacks on people and other animals were reported to Victorian Councils, with an additional 3,786 reported incidents of dogs menacing or threatening people (Herald Sun, 5/5/01).

This equates to around 140 dog aggression incidents reported to Councils each week across Victoria.

When a dog attack in a public place *does* cause serious injury to a human victim (or more commonly, a fatality to an animal victim, often another dog), it tends to generate media attention and a public outcry. This attention can sometimes be directed towards the Government, due to its' perceived failure to protect community safety by controlling dogs in public places.

Although only a small proportion of the total dog population is involved in attacks in public places, and an even smaller proportion involved in attacks causing serious injuries to humans, it is clear that this still poses an unacceptable risk for the community. Laws regarding the confinement of all dogs to the property are designed to uphold the expectation that members of the community can utilise public places safely without being threatened by unrestrained dogs.

In Victoria, local Councils are responsible for implementing comprehensive legislation to control dogs in public places, and to address dog attack incidents. Provisions under the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994* include offences for dogs at large, dog attacks or menace, owner liability for all damages, and powers to have dogs declared dangerous or menacing; the latter imposing stringent requirements to restrain, house and manage a dog so that a repeated attack or menace is prevented.

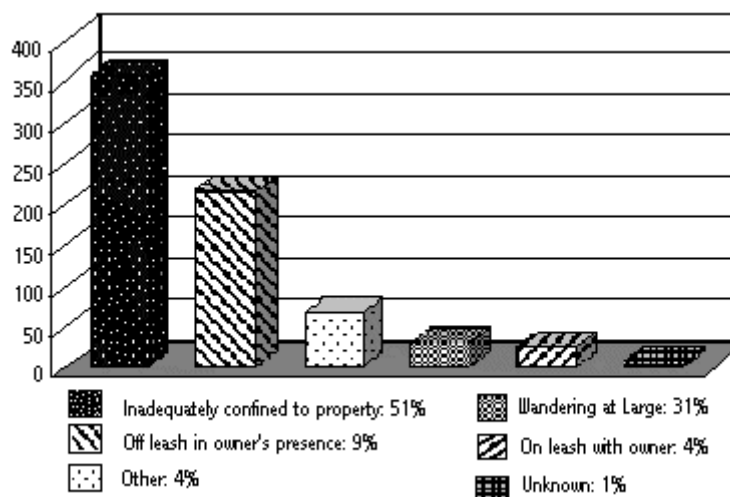
While prevention of dog attacks in private homes does not have a legislative basis (rather more of an educative one), prevention of dog attacks in public places does. But how can Councils, who have the responsibility to implement the legislation, best protect public safety given their often limited resources? An understanding of the factors involved in dog attacks in public places may facilitate better utilisation of limited resources, as may consideration of preventative strategies already tried and tested by a number of Councils in a recent dog attack prevention campaign.

INITIAL SURVEY ON DOG ATTACKS IN PUBLIC PLACES 1997-1999²

Over a two year period, six Melbourne Municipalities (Banyule, Bayside, Knox, Hume, Manningham and Whitehorse Councils) collected detailed information on 700 dog attack and menace incidents. An analysis of the data by the Bureau of Animal Welfare helped identify the factors involved in dog attacks in public places.

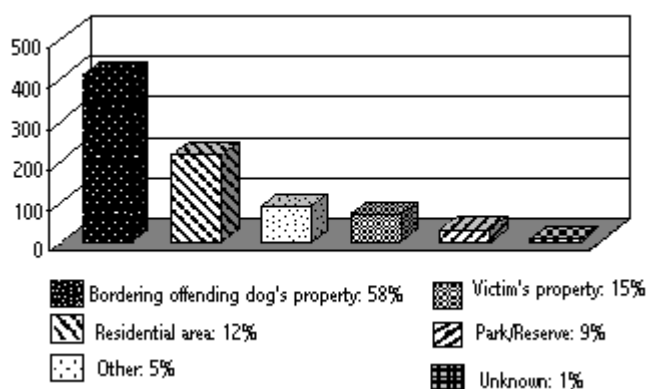
61% of dog aggression incidents involved an attack or bite and 39% involved a rush or chase. Prior to the incident, most dogs in the survey were either inadequately confined on or near their property (51%), or wandering at large (31%) (See Figure One). Therefore, over 80% of dog attack or menace incidents in public places occurred due to dogs not being adequately confined to the property.

Figure 1: Status of dog prior to incident (Bureau of Animal Welfare, 1999)



In most cases, offending dogs were either in the front yard or wandering close by their owner's property prior to the incident. Subsequently, the majority of dog attacks in public places (58%) occurred on the footpath or road bordering the property, due to dogs displaying aggression (possibly territorial) towards passers by (See Figure Two below).

Figure 2: Location of incident (Bureau of Animal Welfare, 1999)



Only 9% of dog aggression incidents in public places occurred in parks or reserves, despite off-leash areas traditionally being a topic of community concern. A possible explanation for this is that dogs tend to be in 'play' mode in this environment, as opposed to behaving more aggressively when defending their property. This was an important finding for those Councils who had previously concentrated much of their patrol resources in parks rather than residential areas. A wide variety of dog breeds (47 in total) were represented in incidents, including several generally considered to be less aggressive breeds. This suggested that the main contributing factor to dog attacks in *public* places is not so much the breed or other characteristics of the dogs involved, but rather the level of responsibility exercised by dog owners in keeping their dogs adequately confined or under control.

Most offending dogs were aged between one and five years old (peaking at three years), and most were male (43% compared with 27% female and 30% unknown). Almost half (48%) of the offending dogs were registered, with 26% unregistered and 26% unknown. Most registered dogs (53%) were desexed (however this data was only collected for registered, not unregistered dogs).

The majority of offending dogs had not been involved in any prior incidents (54%), with 30% of cases unknown, and 16% previously recorded as being at large or involved in a dog aggression incident. The offending dog owners were predominantly male, and aged over 36 years.

There were no known dangerous dogs involved in any of the incidents, despite numerous animals being registered as dangerous across the study area. This highlights the effectiveness of the dangerous dog system in preventing particularly aggressive dogs from re-offending in the community.

Peak periods for dog attack incidents were weekdays between 8am and 10am, and 4pm and 6pm. This may have been due to the fact that there was more activity during weekdays at these times, with people going to and from work and school.

While the most common category of victims involved in the incidents were women aged 30-44 years, both genders and all age groups were represented. The majority of human victims (55%) did not sustain any physical injuries as a result of the incident (ie. they were rushed at or chased by the offending dog). Of the remaining human victims, 37% suffered non-serious, and 5% suffered serious injuries. Victim characteristics for dog attacks in public places differed to those in the Monash University study (primarily victims of attacks in private homes), where victims were hospitalised and most were male and aged 1 to 4 years (Ashby, 1996). Unlike human victims, animal victims were more likely to be killed (29%) or injured (serious 16%, non serious 22%) by dog attacks in public places.

In summary, the 1997-1999 survey on dog attacks in public places identified:

- the footpath or road bordering the attacking dog's property as the most common location of dog attacks in public places; and
- inadequate confinement of dogs to the property as the key factor contributing to dog attacks in public places. If dogs were adequately confined, up to 80% of dog attack incidents in public places could be prevented.

Based on these findings, a number of recommendations relating to legislation amendments and topics for community education were made by the Bureau of Animal Welfare. These resulted in:

- amendment of the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994* to include offences and controls on menacing dogs, to better address the large number of minor incidents (involving no physical injuries) that did not warrant prosecution (previously the only course of restitution for victims) or adequately deal with the offending dogs;
- re-definition of the term 'attack', which had previously included 'attacks, bites, rushes chases and worries', to include only 'attacks and bites', with a new 'menace' category to cover non physical incidents such as rushes and chases;

- implementation of a state-wide Community Education Program focusing on the legal requirement for owners to adequately confine dogs to the property (including safe visitor access to the front door), the potential for any dog to become aggressive when defending its property, and the penalties and liabilities faced by owners in the event of an attack.

In particular, findings from the 1997-1999 survey initiated the development of a Local Government Dog Attack Prevention Strategy, focusing on the adequate confinement of dogs to the property¹, in order to prevent attacks in public places.

Prevention of dog attacks in public places — a Local Government Strategy

In June 2000, a letter was sent to all Victorian Councils from the Bureau of Animal Welfare, presenting the results of the 1997-1999 survey on dog attacks in public places, and inviting any interested Councils to participate in a new dog attack prevention campaign.

Eleven Victorian Councils responded to the invitation. The Councils who undertook the campaign were as follows:

- Banyule City Council;
- City of Greater Bendigo (and their contractors the Lost Dogs' Home);
- City of Boroondara;
- Frankston City Council;
- Knox City Council;
- Loddon Shire Council;
- Manningham City Council;
- Shire of Moorabool;
- Moreland City Council;
- Nillumbik Shire Council; and
- Port Phillip City Council (and their contractors the Lost Dogs' Home).

The Bureau of Animal Welfare provided Councils with advice on the design and implementation of a dog attack prevention campaign, and created a database for Councils to monitor the type and frequency of dog attacks and dogs at large throughout the program.

The Councils themselves were responsible for the vast majority of work in choosing and implementing the various preventative activities and maintaining detailed records. Considering this was a cooperative project for which no funding was available, the participating Councils (some already struggling with limited resources) are to be congratulated. The fact that they were able to sustain such an ambitious project for twelve months indicates the strength of their commitment to address the problem of dog attacks in public places.

Unlike the previous survey on dog attacks in public places, this program was designed with a greater focus on actively implementing dog attack prevention strategies and monitoring their effect, rather than on analysing the factors involved in dog attacks in public places.

Specifically, the project's aims were to:

- design and implement a Council program to reduce the number of dogs at large and dog attacks in public places;
- establish a database/monitoring framework to record dog attacks and dogs at large and measure the impact of dog attack prevention activities;
- determine the most effective strategies for the prevention of dog attacks in public places, to assist with better utilisation of Council resources; and
- assist Councils to improve public safety, and to increase community satisfaction with Council services by engaging in pro-active dog management activities.

Most of the dog attack prevention activities proposed were not new, and have been implemented by numerous Councils in the past. However the project differed by aiming to implement activities in a structured framework that would *allow some assessment of their impact*. Recording and assessing the impact of their work would put Councils in a better position when bargaining for additional resources or when considering the direction of long term dog attack prevention policy. The dog attack prevention campaign involved three main stages:

1. Selection of study areas and initial monitoring

During July and August 2000, meetings were held with participating Councils to discuss project timelines, resources and budgets, and to choose study areas in which to focus the dog attack prevention activities. Councils chose specific areas (such as suburbs or Wards) to implement activities rather than entire Municipalities partly to minimise resource outlay, and partly to give the project a control area to assist with evaluation at a later date².

Where possible, historical records of dog attacks over the previous year were collected. These were used to help determine the most suitable study areas (often areas with a particularly high frequency of dog attacks), and as comparative data at the end of the project.

Councils were provided with their databases, and proceeded to monitor dog attacks and dogs at large (distinguishing between study and control areas) during September and October, to provide pre-project comparative data.

2. Education stage

In November 2000, Councils began implementing an intensive education campaign in their study areas, focusing on getting dog owners to adequately confine their dogs to the property (eg adequate fencing and safe visitor access to the front door).

Education activities implemented by Councils during November, December and January included:

- letters and brochures to all residents in study areas, discussing the dog attack prevention program and explaining the legal obligations of dog owners to confine their dogs to the property;
- articles in local papers;
- displays in Council offices, study area shopping centres, libraries and maternal health/child care centres/pre schools, and at local agricultural shows or pet days;
- campaign posters in Council offices, police stations, milk bars and other public places;
- door knocks to talk to residents in study areas about campaign;
- 'A frame'/sandwich boards displaying campaign messages placed in major through roads in study areas (Frankston City Council);
- media launch of the program (City of Greater Bendigo);
- interviews with local radio stations (City of Greater Bendigo, Frankston City Council and Banyule City Council);
- 'Dog Attack Prevention Kits' distributed to vets, doctors, police, community centres and libraries in study areas (City of Greater Bendigo);
- arrangements with local doctors to assist with the monitoring of dog attacks (City of Greater Bendigo);
- Council telephone 'on hold' messages about the campaign (Banyule City Council);
- cooperation with local Parks and Gardens staff to improve dog safety and dog attack / dog at large reporting (City of Greater Bendigo);
- seminar with local Bark Busters group (City of Greater Bendigo); and
- involvement of local dog obedience groups (City of Greater Bendigo, Port Phillip City Council).

3. Enforcement stage

Following their intensive education campaigns (designed to give dog owners sufficient warning to adequately confine dogs), most Councils began their enforcement activities early in 2001.

The enforcement stage involved Councils rigorously policing the adequate confinement of dogs in study areas through extra streets patrols, many focused during the peak dog attack times identified in the 1997-1999 survey. Dogs seen at large were impounded, and owners of dogs who were inadequately confined (eg in unfenced front yards or poorly fenced properties) were warned or where applicable issued with infringements under s24 of the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994*.

Additional patrol hours in study areas ranged from several hours per week to several hours per day. The increased activities in study areas were quite demanding for many Councils, who also had to maintain regular levels of services in control areas.

RESULTS OF THE DOG ATTACK PREVENTION CAMPAIGN

When considering the outcomes of the dog attack prevention campaign, in some cases the results of individual Councils have been considered, rather than those of participating Councils as a whole. This is because the amount of resources Councils could allocate to the program varied enormously. While the data collection and activities undertaken by Councils with limited resources contributed positively to the project, the outcomes achieved may not have been significant enough to be measurable. On the other hand, Councils that were able to conduct an intensive campaign did achieve measurable results.

Results of the dog attack prevention campaign can be grouped into three main categories:

1. Factors involved in dog attacks in public places

The combined project databases of 10 Councils ³ recorded information on 859 dog aggression incidents (both attacks and menace incidents).

Although the dog attack prevention campaign focused less on collecting detailed information about dog attack incidents than the previous survey, all Councils collected basic information on incidents, and some also chose to record more detailed information than others.

58% of incidents involved an attack or bite (compared to 61% in the previous survey), and 41% involved a rush or a chase (compared to 39% in the previous survey).

Prior to the incident, most dogs were inadequately confined to the property (55%), or wandering at large (18%). Therefore, 73% of dog aggression incidents were due to dogs not being adequately confined to the property, compared to 82% in the previous survey. This 9% drop in the number of dogs inadequately confined coincides with the implementation of the Statewide Community Education Program, which had a major focus on the confinement of dogs during 2000 (and involved mass media coverage such as television commercials).

The main reason for inadequate confinement of dogs was inadequate fencing (46%), followed by accidental escape (22%), and deliberate release (14%). This information was not collected in the previous survey.

The majority of incidents (52%) occurred on the footpath or road bordering the attacking dog's property (compared to 58% in the previous survey).

As with the previous survey, a wide variety of dog breeds (or their crosses) were involved in incidents (60 in total). While the Australian Cattle Dog and the German Shepherd were the most commonly represented breed (or cross) in the database, they were only involved in 9% of all incidents respectively.

Detailed data relating to victim and offending dog characteristics were collected by a number of Councils (Banyule, Frankston, Manningham, Loddon and Moorabool) and again, these trends were comparable to those identified in the previous survey⁴.

2. Trends in reported dog aggression/dog at large incidents

Throughout the dog attack prevention campaign, Councils kept a record of the number of dog attack/ menace incidents, and dog at large incidents in their study and control areas. This was originally considered to be a useful way to monitor the success of the program (ie both the number of dog attacks and dogs at large would indicate the extent to which dog owners were confining their dogs to the property — the key focus of the campaign).⁵

It soon became apparent that the *reported* rate of dog attacks and dogs at large in the community (ie those reported to Councils) did not necessarily reflect the *actual* rate of dog attacks or dogs at large in public places. A number of the participating

Councils experienced a surge in the number of reported attacks/menaces and dogs at large in study areas following education or enforcement activities. These peaks in reporting rates were *not* reflected either in control areas or in the historical data for the same period the preceding year. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that the campaign activities were responsible for these changes.

Increased reporting of incidents following education campaigns might have been due to a number of factors:

- residents may have become more aware of their legal rights regarding dog aggression incidents;
- the campaign may have encouraged residents to 'look out' for, or notice dogs at large more than usual;
- residents may have been more willing to report incidents that they wouldn't otherwise have in the past, because they knew Council would conduct a thorough follow up.

Furthermore, the additional street patrols as part of the enforcement stage resulted in an increase in the number of dogs at large recorded in study areas, as Councils were picking up dogs that wouldn't otherwise have been found.

Nonetheless, these results are encouraging because they suggest many campaign activities seem to have had a measurable impact, despite the impact being an increase (rather than the desired decrease) in reported aggression and dog at large incidents.

By encouraging the public to report all incidents, Councils now have a better idea of the true dog aggression/dog at large situation in study areas, creating more accurate base data for consideration and assessment of future preventative activities.

Dog attack and dog at large rates will be thoroughly analysed following a minimum of 6 months of monitoring after all activities in study areas have ceased (the last Council is finishing activities in July 2001). This long term data should allow more accurate comparison between study and control areas, and subsequently a better indication of the campaign's success.

Similar studies in future may need to utilise a more reliable measuring tool than reporting rates. A possible option is to compare 'observed' rates of dogs at large/dogs inadequately confined (eg per hour) in study areas compared to control areas (before, during and after a campaign). While this approach is probably not practicable for Council Animal Management Officers, this could be an ideal cooperative project with an organisation such as Australia Post.

3. Community survey

When the difficulties of using reporting rates to assess the impact of the campaign were recognised, it was decided to undertake a survey of residents in participating Councils, to obtain feedback on the project, and to assess whether the campaign had any impact on their attitudes and/or behaviour. For instance, were people aware of the campaign, and did they think it was effective? Did dog owners take more care to confine dogs as a result of the campaign, and did it improve people's opinion of Council services?

Due to limited resources, only two Councils could be surveyed — Frankston City Council and City of Greater Bendigo. The Councils chosen were two of the Councils that had completed the most intensive campaigns, one in a suburban area, and one in a rural area.

The surveys were designed under the supervision of Professor Grahame Coleman, Psychology Department at Monash University, and Professor Paul Hemsworth, University of Melbourne. Surveys were designed for dog, cat and non pet owners. As well as surveying residents in study areas (Seaford in Frankston, Heathcote in Bendigo), surveys were designed for residents in control suburbs in the same Municipalities (Langwarrin in Frankston and Epsom/Huntly in Bendigo).

Residents were initially contacted by phone, and if willing to participate, were posted a questionnaire (a 1 in 2 response rate was achieved). A follow up call was made at a suitable time to obtain results over the phone. 105 surveys in study areas, and 100 in control areas were conducted by three researchers (from Monash and Melbourne University) in June 2001.

Analysis of the survey results showed the campaign had a significant impact in both Frankston City Council and City of Greater Bendigo Study areas⁶.

The majority of residents in Seaford (81%) and Heathcote (64%) were aware of their Council's dog attack prevention campaign. By far the most successful campaign

activity mentioned by Seaford residents were the 'A frame' or sandwich boards in streets (seen by 92% of respondents who were aware of the campaign). This may have accounted for the additional 17% of residents aware of the program in Seaford compared to Heathcote, which did not use sandwich boards.

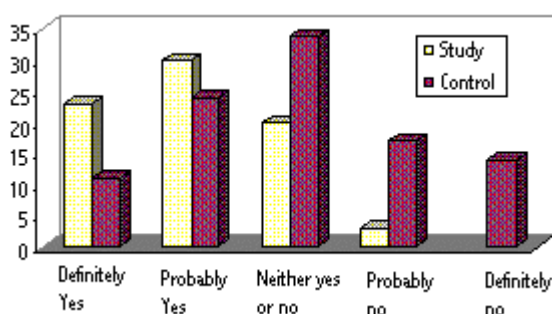
Of those residents in study areas who were aware of the campaign, 97% agreed or agreed strongly with the campaign's message to confine dogs to the property to prevent dog attacks in public places.

24% of study area residents thought the campaign definitely resulted in more dog owners confining their dogs, and a further 53% thought the campaign probably resulted in more dog owners confining their dogs (only 20% answered neither yes or no, and 4% probably no to this question).

Residents in study areas (both those aware and unaware of the campaign) saw significantly more ranger patrols in their streets (36% seeing at least one patrol in the last three months) than residents in control areas (16% seeing at least one patrol in the last three months).

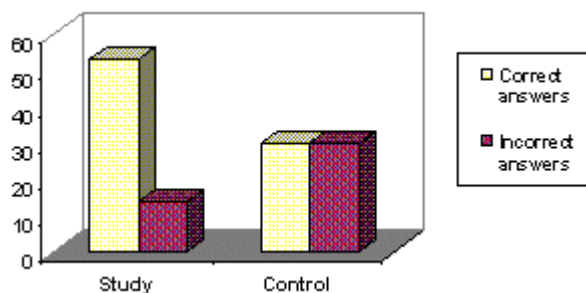
Significantly more residents in study areas had definitely or probably seen fewer dogs wandering the streets in the period since the campaign began (69%) compared to residents in control areas (35%) — see Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Had residents in study areas seen fewer dogs wandering at large during the campaign period, compared to residents in control areas?



When asked a number of true or false questions relating to dog ownership and the law, more residents in study areas answered questions correctly (89%) than residents in control areas (71%). In particular, a question relating to dogs not being allowed to remain in unfenced front yards (a key message of the campaign) was answered correctly by 79% of residents in study areas, but only 40% of residents in control areas. See Figure 4 below.

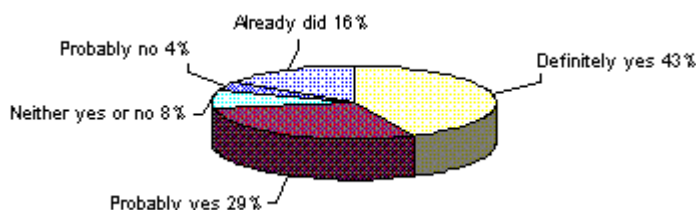
Figure 4 - How well do dog owners in study areas understand the legislation, compared to dog owners in control areas? (survey Q3c)



A few respondents thought the campaign had either been too negative or harsh towards dog owners, while others thought Council was being too 'soft'. However the majority of respondents (69%) who were aware of the campaign had positive comments about it and thought it should be continued. A number of respondents stated they felt safer when walking in public places than they had prior to the campaign, while others commented that they were getting better value for their Council animal management services.

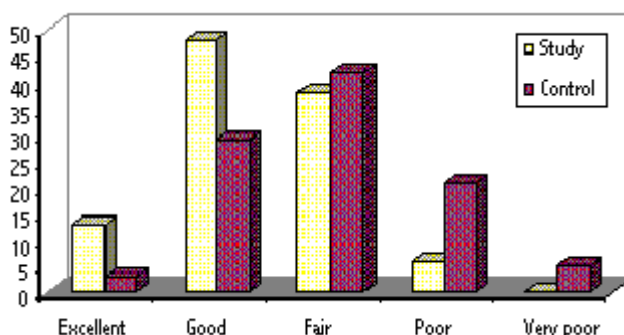
43% of dog owners in study areas said the campaign definitely resulted in them taking more care to confine their dogs, with a further 29% saying the campaign probably resulted in them taking more care to confine their dogs. See Figure 5 below.

Figure 5 - Did the campaign result in dog owners in study areas taking more care to confine their dogs?



Significantly more residents in study areas rated their Council animal management services good or excellent (60%), compared to residents in control areas (32%). See Figure 6 below.

Figure 6 - How do residents in study areas rate their Council animal management services compared to residents in control areas?



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The dog attack prevention activities of Banyule, Bendigo, Boroondara, Frankston, Knox, Loddon, Manningham, Moorabool, Moreland, Nillumbik and Port Phillip Councils provide an invaluable example for other Councils both in Victoria and interstate.

This has been the first project of its kind in Australia, and the hard work and commitment of the participating Councils to get the project up and running, and then to sustain it for almost twelve months, is to be commended.

Dog attack and dog at large trends from the Council databases can not be fully analysed until sufficient post project monitoring has been completed (to compensate for the effects of increased reporting and patrols in study areas). However initial trends in the data do indicate that project activities seem to have had an impact (eg by increasing incident reporting rates) in many study areas.

The results of the community surveys show programs in these Councils⁹ have been successful and have had a dramatic impact in regard to:

- improving residents' opinions of Council animal management services;
- reducing the number of dogs seen wandering at large in the streets;
- ensuring dog owners take more care to confine dogs; and
- improving resident's understanding of their legal rights and obligations in regard to dog ownership and dog attacks in public places.

The project is yet to prove its aim of reducing the actual number of dog attacks and dogs at large (this may be achieved through longer term monitoring of study areas). However it has met its aims to establish a monitoring framework for dog aggression and dog at large incidents, to trial a number of dog attack prevention activities, to meet a duty of care to protect public safety and to improve community satisfaction with Council animal management services. While results from the community survey show education activities and street patrols undertaken by Councils as part of the program were beneficial, the effort and resources required to implement such an intensive campaign may not be practicable for all Councils (particularly given the additional resources required should these activities temporarily increase reporting rates).

However, based on the results of this project, the Bureau of Animal Welfare can recommend a number of effective and relatively inexpensive activities that Councils can implement to improve public safety and the control of dogs in public places:

- if the majority of patrol hours are in parks, re-direct some of these resources towards street patrols, to detect dogs inadequately confined to the property;
- take a preventative approach during street patrols by warning dog owners that have inadequate fencing even if their dog has not yet escaped the property (a Notice to Comply can also be issued);
- invest in several sandwich boards or 'A frame' signs, rotate throughout the Municipality and to places in streets during routine patrols or door knocks, with messages and warnings relating to prevention of dog attacks and the need to adequately confine dogs to the property;

- utilise new provisions for the control of menacing dogs (Division 3A of the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994*) to effectively address incidents involving rushes or chases;
- encourage awareness of dog attacks and dog attack prevention by placing regular media articles in local papers;
- distribute black and white flyers explaining legal requirements for confinement of dogs, and discussing dog attack prevention, when conducting park patrols or routine door knocks (eg registration door knocks);
- borrow the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Responsible Pet Ownership display system (free of charge) for pet care days, stands at local events or shows, or displays in local shopping centres (the display system has a particular focus on dog attack prevention — contact Corporate Communications on 9637 8269 for details);
- place dog attack prevention/dog confinement posters in local Council offices, libraries, police stations or other public places;
- arrange interviews with local radio stations to discuss Council dog attack prevention;
- investigate the possibility of Council office 'on hold' telephone messages including information and advice about dog owner responsibilities and dog attack prevention;
- establish a monitoring framework to measure the type and frequency of dog aggression incidents and dogs at large throughout the Municipality.

The Bureau of Animal Welfare can assist Councils with many of these activities. A specific 'Council Prevention of Dog Attacks in Public Places' kit is available free of charge to interested Councils.

The 'Council Prevention of Dog Attacks in Public Places' kit includes:

- an easy to use, individualised dog attack/menace and dog at large database, for Councils to accurately record the type and frequency of incidents in their Municipality;
- sample media releases;
- sample letter to residents;
- sample posters;
- sample flyers for reproduction and distribution during door knocks/patrols;
- electronic copies of dog attack prevention brochures and fact sheets for reproduction;
- advice on the design and implementation of dog attack prevention campaigns, similar to those discussed in this report.

Contact Neva Van de Kuyt at the Bureau of Animal Welfare on (03) 9217 4113 for details.

Although street patrols are probably one of the most effective ways to detect and remove dogs at large from the public before they are involved in an aggression incident, some Councils may not have as many Animal Management Officers available for street patrols as they would like.

Conducting an education campaign as discussed above, not only gives dog owners plenty of prior warning about legal requirements to confine dogs, but may also assist with most efficient utilisation of patrol resources.

It is also interesting to note that the majority of dogs (46%) involved in aggression incidents escaped due to inadequate fencing. Victorian Councils can utilise section 76A of the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994* to issue a dog owner with a Notice To Comply to provide adequate fencing to keep their dog/s confined to the property. While this section is not currently an offence (it is likely to be in future), a Notice to Comply (in relation to section 24) with Council specified fencing requirements can be used as a document of evidence in court if necessary.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN DOG ATTACK PREVENTION AND RESEARCH

It is important that the prevention of dog attacks in the community is addressed in a balanced way (ie with sufficient focus on preventing attacks in private homes, as well as public places). The Victorian State Government Schools and Community Education Programs (with budgets for the coming year of \$676,000) have a major focus on dog attack prevention in the home (and are discussed in detail in separate papers presented at the 2001 UAM conference). Plans are currently underway to introduce a Kindergarten education program, with a similar focus on child safety around dogs (along with the possibility of programs involving veterinary clinics and medical/infant health centres). A booklet on child safety (including safety with dogs and children) is also currently being developed in consultation with a number of other State Government Departments and interest groups.

The formation of a Victorian domestic animal management advisory committee, made up of Council, interest group and community representatives in the near future will play an important role in monitoring and considering strategies to address the issue of dog attacks in the community. The sharing of information and coordination of Statewide dangerous dog policies through events such as Urban Animal Management Conference meetings (involving key Government policy makers and legislators) may also help guide the direction of future dog attack prevention strategies.

Finally, the Animal Welfare Centre in Victoria has been commissioned to undertake a comprehensive dog aggression literature review, to identify the latest international research on causes of aggression in dogs, and detect areas where future research is needed. Once completed, (and following the 2000 UAM conference), it is anticipated a Dog Attack Prevention Strategy Seminar will be held with relevant Government and research interest groups, to discuss

coordination of current Victorian dog attack prevention activities, and to prioritise future research and funding directions.

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Footnotes:

¹ Most hospitalised dog attack victims bitten in private homes are bitten by their own dog or that of a friend/neighbour, and the Council is not usually involved in handling owner offences or the fate of the dog. In public places, most victims do not know the dog's owner, and report the incident to Council to manage under the relevant legislation.

² At the time of this survey, the term 'dog attack' included attacks, bites, rushes, chases and worries, as defined under s29 of the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994* (this has since been amended). Limited results of the survey are presented in this paper only. For full results see the report 'Dog attacks in public places — a survey conducted by the Bureau of Animal Welfare 1997-1999' (Victoria).

³ 'Adequate confinement to the property' requires fencing through which a dog cannot escape, securely closed gates and doors, and safe visitor access to the front door (the latter applying to properties where front gates are not locked, as defined by Case Law from the Supreme Court). Section 24 of the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994* makes inadequate confinement of dogs to the property an offence.

⁴ Basic monitoring procedures were utilised to help assess the impact of the dog attack prevention campaign. However, due to the nature of the campaign (ie number of external variables that could not be controlled, practical limitations on Council activities) it is not intended to be a rigorously designed scientific experiment.

⁵ One of the eleven Councils was unable to maintain record keeping procedures. As a result, 10 Council databases were included in this analysis.

⁶ Detailed reports on each of the participating Council's activities and database trends will be available late in 2001
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⁷ Study and control areas were different sizes, so dog attack and dog at large data were converted into attack and at large rates per 100,000 people, to enable some comparison of study and control areas.

⁸ Tests for statistical significance included Chi-Square, T, and Mann-Whitney Tests. See Bureau of Animal Welfare, or final report (available late 2001) for details.

⁹ Surveys conducted in Frankston City Council and City of Greater Bendigo. Survey results from these Councils should only be generalised to other Councils with campaigns of comparable intensity.

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