

A statistical approach to developing policy for the management of aggressive dogs

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Abstract

A single incident of a person sustaining an injury from a dog attack may result in the introduction of a regulation that impacts on the entire dog owning community rather than effectively targeting the real problem.

With the requirement to consult with the community when developing new laws or making changes to existing ones, Council must be prepared to justify the proposed changes.

The Brisbane City Council in conjunction with other member Councils of the South East Queensland Region Animal Management Group (SEQRAMG), has developed a centrally located data base for the collection and collation of information pertaining to dog attacks. It is envisaged that analysis of this data will enable Councils to identify real issues and facilitate the development of appropriate counter measures supported by credible evidence to win community support

The aim of this paper is to give the reader an insight into the operation of the system and the potential and expected benefits to Council and the Community.

Introduction

The Queensland Local Government Act provides Councils with the power to make Local Laws for the management of domestic animals appropriate to the needs of Council and the community.

Historically the development and amendment of laws for the management of animals has been driven by community demand via the politicians and the media, or sponsored by Animal Management staff to address changing operational needs. However, as part of the law making process, it is now a requirement of the Qld Local Government Act that a Council proposing a new law or a change to an existing one must first consult with the community and key stakeholder groups through advertising in the print media. All written submissions resulting from the consultation period must be considered before Council resolves to make the law.

As a result of the consultation process, the community is now more aware of the existence of the Animals Local Law and prepared to challenge Council. Pet owners and non-pet owners alike, are more likely to take Council to task over its laws and policies and demand that Council justify any proposed changes.

An area of the Animals Local Law constantly subjected to scrutiny and criticism by the general community, media, various interest groups and at times politicians, is the section that contains the provisions that deal with the management and control of aggressive dogs. I doubt that there is a single Council in Australia that at some time or another has not encountered pressure to introduce provisions to their laws that will magically make the problem of aggressive dogs go away and turn the world into a safer place.

In attempting to address animal management responsibilities, the challenge faced by Council policy makers is to develop defensible laws and policies that clearly address the issue at hand. This can be done but only if the laws and policies are based on sound statistical evidence that clearly identifies the issues and provides justification. A classic example of new legislation being introduced without qualified supporting data is the Breed Specific Legislation (BSL).

It would be fair to say that the major force behind the introduction of BSL was political and driven on by the media. It would be nice for the poor AMO to have the support of sound statistical evidence to fall back on when the polities and the press do about-turns and the Pit Bull lobby is hammering on the door.

What's happening in the South East corner of Queensland?

In order to facilitate the development of credible laws and policies for the management of aggressive dogs, a data collection program has been developed. The program is designed to record in detail, all the facts of dog bite incidents. The program is called a Dog Bite Database (DBDB) and should not be confused with a dangerous dog register database. The latter is designed to record and monitor the existence and movements of dogs declared dangerous. The DBDB is designed solely to capture core information pertaining to the circumstances of a dog attack for the purpose of professional analysis. It is expected that by analysing the data, clear trends and causative factors will be identified on which to base new policies and regulations capable of withstanding critical scrutiny.

Dog Bite Database evolution

The South East Qld Region Animal Management Group (SEQRAMG) is comprised of all Councils within the South East corner. SEQRAMG first put forward the DBDB initiative at a meeting in June 2003. Following this, a series of workshops was held with representatives from regional Councils. As a result, an agreed data base template was created to capture information relating to all dog bite situations.

With the development of the template, a number of SEQRAMG member Councils commenced collecting the data. However in order for the database to fulfil its objective, it was necessary to establish a central database capable of housing data from all participating Councils for comparison purposes. To address this requirement, the Local Government Association Qld agreed to host the DBDB and locate it on the Local Government Toolbox thus making it available to any Qld Council wishing to participate. Obviously the greater the number of participating Councils, the greater the volume of statistics available for analysis.

A fundamental requirement of the template and the data captured through it, is to ensure that the privacy of the respective council, victim and dog owner is not compromised. At the same time, the data has to be sufficiently detailed to meet analytical requirements. The following is some of the key data to be collected:

- Victim type
- Victim age group
- Gender of dog
- Dog breed or type
- Time of day of incident and geographic location,
- Environment
- Containment provisions for the dog
- Relationships between victim and dog
- Injury characteristics
- Previous history and many other key factors.

As the database content grows over time, it is envisaged that professional analysis will provide Councils with greatly insight and understanding as to the causes of dog attacks. This in turn will facilitate the development of appropriate counter measures that are acceptable to the community

Functionality, design and access

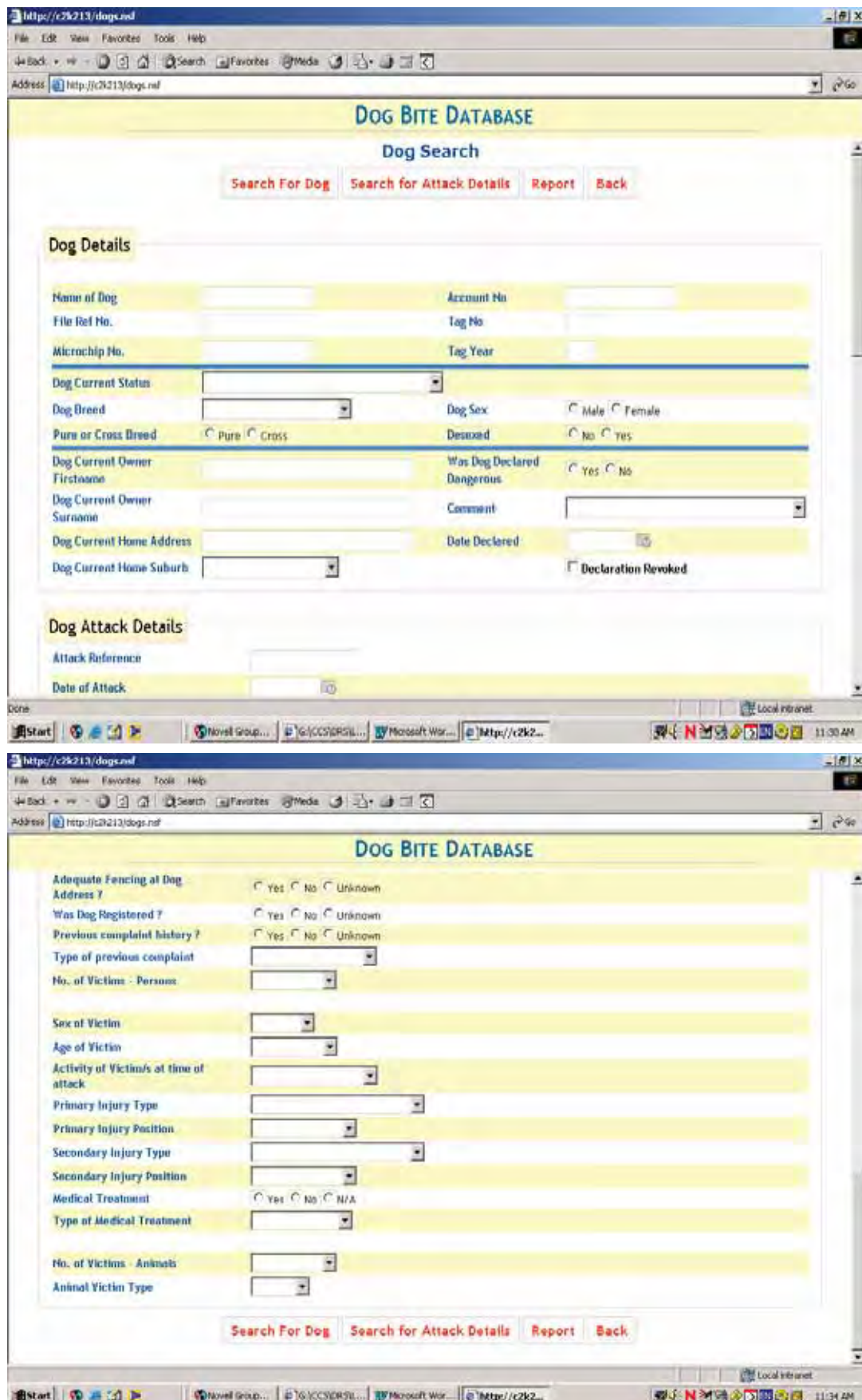
The database provides each Council with full access to their data and can produce reports specific to their own area. The program does not allow a Council to access data specific to another Council. Generated reports are secure and can only be accessed by persons with authorised log in access and delivered directly to that person's e-mail address.

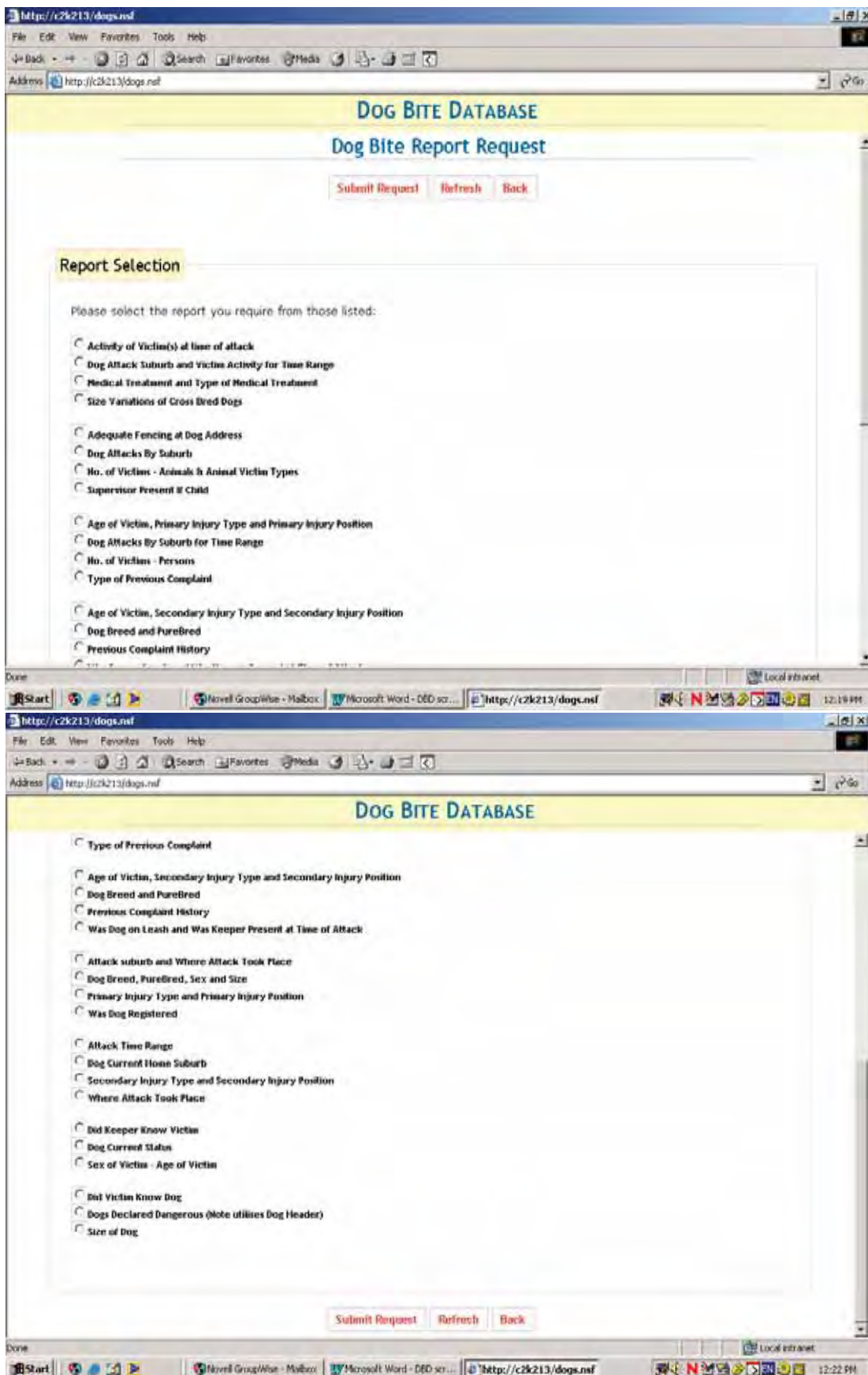
For analysis purposes it is essential that standard descriptions be used. To ensure this occurs, entries for the thirty required core information fields can only be made from the choices provided by using the drop down arrows. The following table lists the input choices for each of the fields.

Field input choices

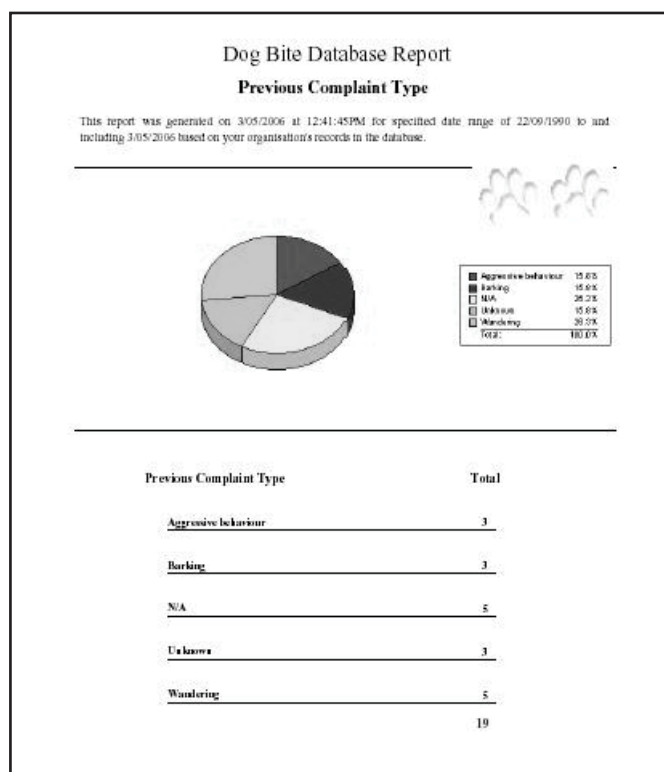
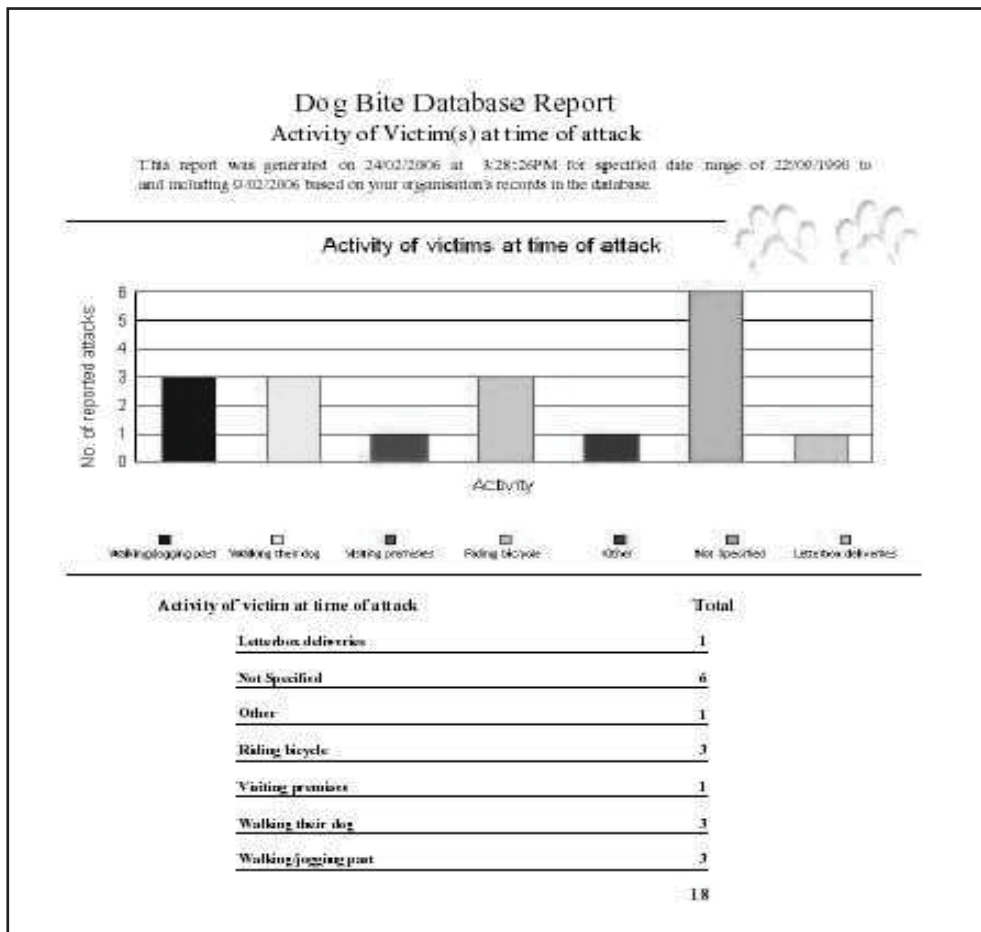
No	Field	Input choices
1	Attack Reference	Free text
2	Date of attack	dd/mm/yy
3	Time of attack	hr:min am / pm in 12 hour format
4	Dog Sex at time of attack	Male Entire, Male Desexed, Female Entire, Female Desexed, Unknown
5	Dog Breed at time of attack	List of all breeds, Undetermined
6	Pure or Cross Breed	Pure, Cross, Undetermined
7	Size of Dog	Small, Medium , Large
8	Attack Suburb	Lists suburbs relevant to council
9	Where did attack take place?	Backyard, Footpath, Front yard, Off leash area, Park, Private property, Public place, Roadway, Shopping centre, Sports oval, Unknown
10	Was Dog on Leash?	Yes, No, Unknown
11	Was Keeper present at time of attack?	Yes, No, Unknown
12	Did Victim know dog?	Yes, No, Unknown
13	Did Keeper know Victim?	Yes, No, Unknown
14	Supervisor present if Child?	Yes, No, N/A
15	Adequate Fencing at Dog Address?	Yes, No, Unknown
16	Was Dog Registered?	Yes, No, Unknown
17	Previous complaint History	Yes, No, Unknown
18	Type of previous complaint	Wandering, Barking, Registration, Aggressive behaviour, N/A
19	No. of Victims - Persons	0,1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
20	Sex of Victim	Male, Female, N/A, Unknown
21	Age of Victim	0-4 years, 5-12 years, 13-18 years, 19-50 years, over 50 years, Unknown, N/A
22	Activity of Victim/s at time of attack	Postman, Letterbox deliveries, Walking / jogging past, Walking their dog, Visiting premises, Riding bicycle, Other
23	Primary Injury Type	Fatal, Laceration/s, Minor bruising & / or abrasion/s, Puncture wound, Tissue loss, Damage to clothing, Sprain/muscular, Unknown, N/A
24	Primary Injury Position	Lower front torso, Upper front torso, Upper back, Lower back, Arm/s, Leg/s, Hand/s, Ankle, Feet, Head, Face, Unknown, N/A
25	Secondary Injury Type	Fatal, Laceration/s, Minor bruising &/or abrasion/s, Puncture wound, Tissue loss, Damage to clothing Sprain/muscular, Unknown, N/A
26	Secondary Injury Position	Lower front torso, Upper front torso Upper back, Lower back, Arm/s, Leg/s, Hand/s, Ankle, Feet, Head, Face, Unknown, N/A
27	Medical Treatment	Yes, No, N/A
28	Type of Medical Treatment	Hospital, Doctor, Ambulance, Home treatment, Vet, Unknown, N/A
29	No. of Victims - Animals	0-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
30	Animal Victim Type	Bird, Cat, Chicken, Dog, Duck, Goat, Goose, Horse, Sheep, Stock, Other, N/A

The following are screen display examples of the dog bite database.





The following are examples of reports that can be generated from the dog bite database.



Dog Bite Database Report	
Dog Attacks By Suburb	
	
This report was generated on 3/05/2006 at 12:41:41PM for specified date range of 22/09/1990 to and including 3/05/2006 based on your organisation's records in the database.	
Suburbs selected:	All
Archerfield	1
Ascot	1
Ashgrove	1
Aspley	1
Bracken Ridge	1
Bridgman Downs	1
Brookfield	1
Doonan	1
Everton Park	1
Fishermans Islands	1
Indala	3
Newmarket	1
Other Council	2
Stafford	2
Stafford Heights	1
Total Attacks Reported	19

About the Author

Pete Lumsdale is the Program Officer Local laws & Health Promotion - Brisbane City Council. He has been engaged in the area of Urban Animal Management for the past 18 years. Prior to joining Local Government in 1989, Pete served with the RAAF Police Dogs for 21 years as a Handler, Trainer, Instructor, Researcher, Kennel Master Administrator, Field Section Commander and Warrant Officer Police Dog Inspector. After leaving the service, Pete took up a position with the Redland Shire Council where for the next 10 years he established and managed the animal control section. Pete left the Redlands in 1999, to take up his present position as with the Brisbane City Council where he is required to advise Council on the ever-changing community needs in regard to all domestic animals kept in the urban environment, and develop appropriate management policies and strategies to meet the needs of the community and Council.