NEW MENACING DOG LAWS PASS PARLIAMENT

Local Government Minister Don Page and Minister for Primary Industries Katrina Hodgkinson today announced the passing of amendments to the Companion Animals Act which created a new category of “menacing dog” and tougher penalties for irresponsible dog owners to help safeguard the community.

The Liberals & Nationals Government is overhauling the way companion animals are managed in NSW, to better protect the NSW community from the threat of dangerous dog attacks and ensure animal welfare.

Mr Page and Ms Hodgkinson set up the Companion Animals and Dangerous Dogs Taskforce to examine regulatory options available to reduce the number of serious dog attacks.

Mr Page said a comprehensive package of measures was announced to respond to the Companion Animal Taskforce and to concerns about dangerous and threatening dogs.

“Clearly we care deeply about our pets and want the best for them. But, at the same time, people are rightly horrified and outraged when there are dog attacks resulting in serious injury or death,” Mr Page said.

The new laws will make it easier for councils to deal with menacing dogs because rangers will not have to wait until someone is attacked before they can act.

They also bring penalties in NSW into line with other states.

Ms Hodgkinson said the Act already has significant powers and sanctions to deal with dangerous dogs, but the criteria for categorising a dog as dangerous are too high.

“Often a dog cannot be classified as dangerous until it kills or seriously injures a person or another animal,” Ms Hodgkinson said.

“These new laws will enable councils to require controls on dogs that are menacing but have not yet reached the dangerous threshold.”
The NSW Government will also seek to immediately implement some important recommendations from the Taskforce resulting in better animal welfare protection and better education for the community about caring for and being safe around companion animals.

The legislation, which passed last night, also expands the current primary-school based Responsible Pet Ownership program to pre-school children and to families expecting new children to increase awareness about safety and how to behave around dogs.

Mr Page and Ms Hodgkinson thanked the Companion Animals Taskforce and members of the public who provided their views and expertise on these important issues.

In addition to creating a new category of ‘menacing or potentially dangerous dog’ the legislation includes harsher penalties such as prison terms for irresponsible owners and encourages owners to de-sex their animals.

A dog defined as menacing will have to be muzzled and under the control of an adult when in public.

The Taskforce, chaired by practising vet Andrew Cornwell MP, provided two reports to the NSW Government with 38 recommendations. The reports were released for public consultation, with more than 5300 submissions received.

“Under the new rules there will be increased penalty notice amounts and court penalties for failure to register a companion animal and where a dog has been involved in an attack,” Mr Page said.

“The stronger penalties include the introduction of jail terms for owners whose dogs have been involved in an attack, increasing to a maximum of five years for owners whose dogs have attacked after the owner has failed to comply with a menacing, requirement by council.

“Failure to register a companion animal, (no matter where it is kept) will increase from $165 to $275.

“And if the matter goes to court, a fine up to $6600 can be imposed,” Mr Page said.

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