

Perth Now

Western Australia

Dog laws are useless: rangers

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TOUGH dog laws to eradicate dangerous breeds are not working and should be scrapped, the WA Rangers Association says.

Legislation introduced last year aims to wipe out aggressive breeds such as pit bull terriers through compulsory sterilisation.

Dog owners who flout the laws, which include muzzling and other strict controls on restricted-breed animals, face fines of up to \$5000.

But the association, which represents council rangers responsible for enforcement, says the legislation is difficult to police and even harder to prosecute.

Association president Samantha Tarling said the close genetic make-up of dog breeds made it impossible to prove a dog was a pit bull terrier, even with DNA testing, and owners were getting around the laws by claiming their pets were a different breed.

"People are registering pit bulls as a boxer cross, which is legal," Ms Tarling said. "Not even the chief vet at the Agriculture Department will stand up in court and say 'This is a pit bull'."

In November, a man had his ear bitten off when two pit bulls joined their owner in an alleged road-rage attack in Redcliffe. A similar attack in Halls Creek left a 48-year-old man without part of his nose and another man was also savaged. This week, a pit bull fatally mauled a five-year-old girl in Britain.

WA's dog restrictions apply also to the exotic breeds Japanese Tosa, Dog Argentino, Fila Brasileira and Presa Canario.

Ms Tarling said rangers wanted the existing legislation dumped and replaced with an amended law to target individual animals instead of breeds.

She said singling out breeds wrongly assumed all those dogs were aggressive and that others were not dangerous.

"We would prefer to see the dangerous breed restriction taken away and the Act amended so that any aggressive dog can be declared dangerous," she said.

"The existing laws are penalising everyone who owns a restricted breed, even if their dog is docile, and

are not targeting some dangerous dogs that the restrictions do not apply to."

Local Government Minister John Bowler said the Dog Act could be amended, but the ban on dangerous breeds would remain.

"When I was Minister for Local Government I made the decision to ban pit bull terriers because they are a particularly vicious breed," he said. "Incidents like this week's tragic fatal attack in England confirm it was the right thing to do."

"Just because a law is difficult to police doesn't make it any less important."

Endangered Dog Breeds Association WA spokeswoman Ivy Bilos said pit bulls were being singled out unfairly when the Government should be targeting irresponsible dog owners.

"We do not have bad dogs, we have bad owners," she said.

"We do not have a pit bull problem in Australia. The problem is at the other end of the leash and that is what the Government should be targeting, regardless of what breed the dog is."

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