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Pit bulls muzzled Minister acts after savage dog attacks
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OWNERS of American **pit bull** terriers will have to muzzle their animals in public under a law announced yesterday.

NSW will be the first State to take the tough action against the breed after a series of attacks, including the fatal mauling of an elderly woman late last year.

The new regulation would be in force by the end of the month "in the interests of public safety", Local Government Minister Ernie Page said yesterday.

He did not rule out putting muzzles on other breeds, including dobermans and rottweilers.

But the **RSPCA** claims muzzles are useless in controlling the aggression of American **pit bull** terriers and has called for much tougher measures.

A 79-year-old woman was savaged to death by one of the dogs on December 27 last year in Toowoomba, Queensland.

The dog jumped a fence from a neighbour's yard before biting the face, neck, arms and legs of Barbara Stringer, killing her.

Two other attacks were reported in Sydney over the past two weeks.

RSPCA chief executive officer Charles Wright said he was told the **pit bulls** were so strong they could tear the head gear off if they become agitated.

"It's been put to me that it's near impossible to muzzle this breed," Dr Wright said.

He added there were other concerns that muzzles were cruel because they restricted a dog's panting ability.

The **RSPCA** has demanded the **pit bulls** be declared dangerous under existing law.

This would require owners of the dogs to have them desexed and wear an identifiable collar.

Owners would also have to provide suitable fencing and warning signs on gates.

Dr Wright said owning the dogs was "like having a loaded gun in your backyard". It is understood there are about 1000 pure-bred American **pit bull** terriers in NSW, although there is no register of the exact number.

The dogs are particularly dangerous because of their ability to lock their jaws on to a victim.

The Federal Government banned the importation of the breed from the US about five years ago.

American **Pit Bull** Terrier Association spokesman Stephen Collier said the dogs were not bred to kill, rather "they are bred to be companions and nice family dogs". He did concede, however, they were originally bred to kill other dogs.

But Dr Collier said his association welcomed the muzzle requirement to ease public concerns.

"In a sense it reassures the community who have been led to believe there are land sharks running the streets."

Fact file on killer breed

APPEARANCE: Large head, broad shoulders and lean body, not unlike a rottweiler although with shorter legs.

NUMBER: It is believed there are about 1000 pure bred American **pit bull** terriers in NSW, although there could be thousands of cross breeds.

RECENT ATTACKS: An elderly woman was killed in Queensland late last year. There have been two attacks in Sydney in recent weeks.

ORIGIN: Originally bred to kill other dogs. Owners claim the dogs now make harmless family pets.