

Push for tough dog laws

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Date: 29/12/1995
Words: 426

Publication: The Age
Page: 5

The RSPCA yesterday called for a tougher clamp on vicious dogs after the fatal mauling of an elderly woman by a pit- bull terrier.

The society's president, Dr Hugh Wirth, said dog owners should face massive fines or jail terms if their pets attacked people or other animals.

Dr Wirth said Wednesday night's death of a 79-year-old Queensland woman savaged by a pit-bull terrier should prompt governments to make dog owners more responsible for their pets' actions.

``Unless we can force these cowboys to change their attitudes . . . we'll get nowhere."''

Police in Toowoomba, 100 kilometres west of Brisbane, yesterday revealed that the woman killed on Wednesday, Barbara Joan Stringer, died of massive haemorrhages and severe shock after being bitten more than 10 times on the face, neck, arms and legs.

A neighbor who tried to help by hitting the pit-bull terrier with a tyre iron was also bitten.

The dog was later destroyed.

Dr Wirth said pit-bull terriers were dangerous because their basic instinct was to attack and fight viciously.

He said it was very easy to turn a pit-bull terrier mad.

``As long as the pit-bull terrier is not switched on to its natural fighting mode then it's a nice dog. The trouble is it can instantly change."''

Dr Wirth called on the Victorian Government to tighten its new Domestic Animals Act to include tougher penalties for owners of dog involved in vicious attacks.

Under the act, which takes effect next year, dog owners will be liable to a maximum \$500 fine if their dog ``rushes at, attacks, bites, worries or chases any person or animal"''.

A spokesman for the Agriculture Minister, Mr McGrath, said any suggestions Dr Wirth had on penalties would be considered.

Dr Wirth rejected suggestions for a ban on pit-bull terriers, saying it would only drive the breeding of pit bull terriers ``underground"''.

``It's not the dog's fault that it acts according to its breeding. It's not the dog's fault that it was bred to fight, " he said.

However, the RSPCA's Queensland operations manager, Dr Cam Day, said yesterday: ``We don't need these dogs. They just bowl in like thunderclap with no warning.

``Other dogs will give some warning by . . . growling or barking. And if they bite they will grip and then let go.

``But when pit bull terriers bite they don't let go. They only let go to take in more flesh."''

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