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## **Tougher laws for dangerous dogs**

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WA's dangerous-dog laws will be toughened after it emerged that restricted breeds like American pit bulls are being sold openly because the three-year-old legislation does not include a ban on breeding or selling the targeted species.

The crackdown on dangerous dogs by the former Labor government required owners of certain breeds to sterilise pups at six months so the breed would eventually cease.

But the law has been undermined by the absence of a ban on imports from other States and difficulties in proving genetically that a dog is of a particular breed. These loopholes and no bans on selling or breeding the animals have allowed the trade in restricted dogs to continue openly.

A simple internet search by The West Australian this week revealed sellers and breeders advertising pit bull pups for between \$400 and \$1800. "The current legislation has technical gaps in it," Local Government Minister John Castrilli said. "It does not actually say that you can't breed (restricted) dogs."

The current laws force owners to fit different collars, get a permit if they own more than two restricted breeds and keep the animals within a secure area. Mr Castrilli wants to ban breeding and selling or giving away the restricted breeds. "It will be some time this year, but we are going to make it as tight as possible," he said.

Former local government minister Michelle Roberts announced in March 2006 that the Argentinian fighting dog, the filo brasileiro, the tosa inu, the American pit bull and the presa canario would be restricted as part of Labor's bid to "protect families and children from harm". The pit bull is Australia's most common restricted breed.

She claimed the new laws would apply to mixed breeds which "visibly contain the traits of these restricted breeds". But WA Rangers' Association president Samantha Tarling said identification had emerged as a fundamental problem, with WA's chief veterinarian refusing to "testify to the DNA" of a dog.

“I once challenged some owners that their dog was a pit bull,” she said.  
“They showed me the parents with the paperwork. It was a cross between a boxer and a labrador. I could have sworn it was a pit bull.”

She said some pit bulls looked like bull mastiffs, a breed that is not restricted. Chief veterinary officer Peter Buckman referred all questions to the Department of Local Government.

Endangered Dog Breeds Association spokesman Anthony Melman blasted the proposed amendments.

“The number of children killed by dogs I can count on one hand,” he said.  
“How many children have been killed by their own family members?”