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Introduction

We, Amity Shroads and Kat Gusarova, submit this written evidence as a pair of individuals with a passion for the dog fancy. We thank the committee for their attention on this matter and wish to present evidence that will support a revocation of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

It is our hope that the DDA will be replaced with a more modern law that will be better suited for protecting the public and at no expense of this country's canine companions.

In this submission, we will discuss the lacking efficiency of breed specific legislation (BSL), prove that visual identification is a poor indicator of dog behaviour, show that the British public is indeed opposed to breed bans and, finally, present the committee with alternative solutions that have been proven to reduce dog bites in other countries.

Effectiveness of BSL-based models

In spite of the DDA being in place for nearly three decades, as of this submission, there is no scientific or statistical evidence to suggest that the law has effectively reduced the frequency or severity of dog-related injuries to people.

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE), of which the United Kingdom is a member, supports this claim and strongly believes that the most effective means of preventing and controlling aggression is not to ban specific breeds, but to direct measures at the individual dog and its owner. Furthermore, they state that any dog of any breed, type or mixed breeding can show aggression ¹.

There is even ample evidence to prove that the banned breeds are no more likely to bite than any other breed.

A study was done in the United Kingdom to determine whether breed specific legislation had actually worked. This study, reported in the Canadian Veterinarian in 2005, examined the frequency and severity of dog-bite injuries at a Dundee hospital Accident and Emergency Department, before and after the implementation of the DDA.

In the 3-month period before the DDA was implemented, 99 cases of dog bites were reported, 3% of which were from pit bull type dogs. When the number of dog bites were examined in a 3-month period 2 years after the ban was implemented, there was no change in the number of reported dog bites (99 cases), and the number of cases involving pit bulls was similar (5% of bites) ².

The above-mentioned journal reported another UK study, which found that prior to the implementation of the DDA, 24% of people admitted to a hospital with dog bite injuries were bitten by German shepherds, compared with 18.2% bitten by mongrels, and 6% bitten by “dangerous” breeds (pit bull terriers, rottweilers, and Dobermans). This study also showed that typical family breeds, such as Labradors, collies, Jack Russell terriers, and cocker spaniels, were biting at higher rates than the ‘dangerous dogs’ ³.

Furthermore, though the deaths from dog bites in 1991 were the primary reason for the DDA to be implemented, there is absolutely no indication that the DDA has been able to prevent further human deaths. Between 1991 and 2015, a staggering total of 63 people in England and Wales were killed by dogs ⁴.

Cost implications are also important to mention. Financial repercussions of kenneling dogs seized under Section One of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 are draining vital resources away from police services around the country. In 2002 it cost the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) approximately £250,000 to keep these dogs in kennels ⁵.

From this information, it becomes clear that the DDA was not born out of any logical basis, but was rather an emotional response influenced by sensationalism in the media at the time. We believe the way forward is to implement a legislation which uses the latest scientific evidence which is backed by veterinarians and other canine professionals.

Issues with using visual identification to determine dog behavior

Substantial evidence exists that utilising visual identification as a way to determine breed, then using breed as a predictor for dog behaviour, is problematic. According to one study, 90% of dogs were not predominantly composed of their visually identified breeds when DNA-based breed analyses were performed^{8,9}.

In a study of 256 dog bite fatalities, seven common factors comprised the majority. In many cases, more than one of these occurred simultaneously, yet all are able to be manipulated and controlled by outside influences. These factors are listed as follows:

- No able-bodied person available to intervene (87%);
- Victim was a stranger to the dogs (85%);
- Dogs were sexually intact (84%);
- Victim unable to handle/manage dogs due to age or condition (77%);
- Dogs were not family pets (76%);
- Prior incidents with mishandling/mismanagement of dogs (38%);
- Abuse and neglect of dogs (21%).

When reviewing the above, there are multiple ways to reduce dog bites utilising public education and assistance campaigns rather than relying on the disproven and outdated model of visual identification as a predictor of dog behaviour¹⁰.

Additionally, 90% of the dogs in the aforementioned fatal bite study were reported by the news media as belonging to a single breed, despite the fact that documentation of breed was rarely available. Accurate identification of breed was able to be made in only 18% of the 256 cases. Of those 18%, 20 different breeds were represented. Therefore, it is not reliable to utilise the news media as a source of information regarding breed identification¹¹.

In trying to determine whether a dog is dangerous, behaviors like growling, lunging, barking, and snapping are taken into account. In one study, 41% of dogs have displayed such behavior towards a known person at one point or another in their lives. Of these, only 15% bit and fewer than 10% resulted in injury. It becomes clear that such behaviours are not an accurate predictor for whether a dog is dangerous^{10,12,14}.

Dr Ian Dunbar's bite severity scale has been shown to be a good predictor of whether or not a dog is dangerous and what actions could be taken to keep the public safe based on the

individual bite incident. Utilising this scale, combined with public education and safety campaigns, will help all to have safe interactions with dogs and reduce bite rates¹³.

Public Opinion on The Dangerous Dog Act 1991

Though it is often cited that the DDA, at the very least, provides some comfort to the public and gives them a sense of security, this is simply not the case.

A survey conducted by DEFRA in 2010 asked a total of 67 organisations if they believe that breed specific legislation in the UK is effective in protecting the public from dangerous dogs, and an overwhelming 88% (out of 2850 responses) said No.

When asked if they wanted the BSL repealed, 71% (out of 2737 responses) responded Yes, stating that the law had not reduced dog attacks, was too costly and did not target dogs that were actually dangerous⁶.

It also becomes clear from this survey that animal professionals, in particular, find BSL to be nonsensical and do not support it. The RSPCA, British Veterinary Association, the Kennel Club and the PDSA were amongst those who supported a repeal.

This information points out that the British public is ready for a change in legislation.

Way Forward

As a conclusion, we believe that the way forward is to repeal the breed specific legislation in the DDA and replace it with a modern law that reflects the current findings in science and statistics. We would therefore like to point your attention to the so-called Calgary Model, which, to date, is the only legislation in the world that has been conclusively proven to reduce dog bites.

The Calgary Model is the name for Bylaw 23M2006, which was implemented in the city of Calgary in Canada in 2006.¹⁷

Three years after enacting this model, the city of Calgary reported the lowest amount of dog bites in 25 years; 137 in 2009. For comparison, the year of 1985 had 621 dog bites reported.

For comparison, the province of Ontario enacted the Ontario BSL Bylaw in 2005, outlawing “pit bull type” dogs and destroying these dogs based on their appearance. This resulted in no overall change in bite statistics, in spite of pit bull type dogs nearly being extinct in the province. On the contrary, dog bites are on the rise.⁷

Part of the Calgary Model’s success includes teaching elementary school children about dog behaviour and how to act safely.

All dogs over three months of age residing in Calgary must also be licensed and have permanent identification, preferably a microchip. Owners will be fined if their dogs do not have license and identification, which has resulted in 90% of Calgary’s dogs to be licensed.¹⁵

Calgary has also introduced a subsidized spay and neuter program so low-income families can afford to sterilize their dogs.

Calgary’s model is self-funded by licensing and fines, which enabled the city to train animal control officers who patrol the city. This has resulted in a 80% reduction in bites.¹⁶

We believe that the UK can benefit from studying this law and implementing similar methods.

Possible education campaigns could include instruction regarding appropriate interaction with unfamiliar dogs, incentives for owners to sterilise their animals, and guidelines for the secure containment and care of dogs not kept as family pets. Ensuring that those who live alone with dogs receive support, training, and education on their care could also be helpful. Community-based initiatives regarding proper dog containment and management also reduces bite rates.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to public comment on this matter and thank the committee for their time.

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Appendix

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14: Human directed aggression in domestic dogs (Canis familiaris): Occurrence in different contexts and risk factors:
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15: The Montreal Gazette, How Calgary Reduced Dog Attacks Without Banning Pit bulls:
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16: Dogs Monthly, End of BSL: <https://dogsmoonthly.co.uk/2017/08/15/32881/>

17: The Calgary Model:
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