# Public responses to dog control survey

On 1 August 2016, Hon Louise Upston, the Associate Minister of Local Government, published an online survey ‘Reducing dog attacks – share your thoughts’ (the survey) which ran until 14 August 2016. The survey asked respondents what they considered was biggest contributing factor to dog attacks, and sought suggested ways to reduce attacks.

The Department of Internal Affairs (the Department) has analysed the number of responses to questions with predetermined responses and has coded all free-text responses into themes for quantitative analysis. Information on the demographics of respondents is provided as Appendix A.

## Biggest contributing factor to dog attacks

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Figure 1: Biggest contributing factor to dog attacks

Respondents could only select one response to this question. The majority of respondents considered that dog owners were the biggest contributing factor to dog attacks (62%). A large number of respondents also considered education about dog behaviour was the biggest contributing factor (27%). Together, these options made up almost 90 per cent of the overall responses.

### Common explanations for responses

The typical themes that emerged for each of the above categories and quotes from submitters are provided below.

#### Lack of obedience training is a key problem

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Figure 2: Why dog owners are the biggest contributing factor

Respondents predominantly considered that owners caused dog attacks due to poor or absent obedience training (33%), because they were not educated about dog behaviour/ownership (24%), or simply because bad owners often lead to dangerous dogs (21%).

*“All dogs regardless of breed and size can lash out when pushed too far. It is an owner’s responsibility to have a well-trained, under control dog and to keep both the dog and people safe.”*

#### Misunderstanding of dog behavioural signals leads to attacks

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Figure 3: Why education about dog behaviour is the biggest contributing factor

Respondents noted that people often misunderstand dog behavioural signals (44%) which can contribute to an attack. Many respondents also considered that children need to be educated on how to properly interact with dogs (31%).

*“…people do not interpret dog behaviour correctly. They do not pay attention to the dogs signals, no matter how big or small those signals are.”*

#### Certain breeds are much more dangerous[[1]](#footnote-1)

Of the 154 respondents that considered dog breed was the biggest contributing factor to attacks, 89 per cent noted that this was because certain breeds are much more dangerous. The other 11 per cent did not offer an explanation.

*“Some dogs have been bred to fight. It is in their DNA… When these breeds of dogs are let loose in the community, or left alone with vulnerable people, then their instincts will take over.”*

#### Parents have a responsibility to educate their children on dog safety

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Figure 4: Why parents are the biggest contributing factor

The majority of respondents who considered parents to be the biggest contributing factor to dog attacks explained that this is due to a lack of education for children on dog safety (71%). Other respondents noted that parents not properly supervising their children around dogs was also a contributing factor (31%).

*“Parents should be ensuring children know how to act around dogs, and should never leave children alone with dogs.”*

## Best ways to reduce dog attacks

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Figure 5: Best way to reduce dog attacks

Respondents could select multiple responses for this question. The majority of respondents considered that providing education about dog behaviour (84%), and requiring obedience classes for owners (62%), were the best ways to reduce dog attacks.

#### Dog owners should be tested for suitability to own a dog

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Figure 6: Suggested other ways to reduce dog attacks

Respondents often suggested testing minimum standards, or introducing a licensing scheme (31%), to be a dog owner. Another common suggestion was to increase existing penalties for poor ownership (21%).

*“Dog licencing like driver licencing [sic]… a car can kill people - need a licence. A gun can kill people - need a licence. Dogs can kill people - should need a licence.”*

### How owners can help reduce dog attacks

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Figure 7: How owners can help to reduce dog attacks

Respondents could select multiple responses for this question. Key suggestions included owners properly fencing off their property (82%), and taking more care when in public with their dog (79%). Many respondents also recommended other options in free-text fields, which are provided below.

#### Owners need to educate themselves on dog behaviour

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Figure 8: Suggested other ways owners can reduce dog attacks

Respondents noted that owners need to educate themselves more on dog behaviour (26%), and should put more effort into exercising/training their dog (22%).

*“Dogs need good socialisation as puppies - this goes well beyond simply taking obedience training. The idea that dogs should always be leashed and/or muzzled in public is an over simplification and counter productive [sic]. A healthy dog will love a chance to go for a good run and off leash at a beach where this is permitted is a great place to do this… Many owners seem not to be aware of their dog’s behaviour, particularly owners of small dogs with fear aggression issues - this is where owners need better education about their animals...”*

### How councils can help reduce dog attacks

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Figure 9: How can councils help to reduce dog attacks?

Respondents could select multiple responses for this question. Respondents focused heavily on councils taking punitive action against irresponsible dog owners (82%), and establishing more exercise-friendly areas for dogs (64%). Some respondents also recommended other options in free-text fields, which are provided below.

#### Councils should run public education campaigns

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Figure 10: Suggested other ways councils can help reduce attacks

Many respondents suggested councils should run public education/awareness campaigns (34%) and test dog owners for competence (14%).

*“Education in schools! Start with the youth and they will teach their parents and then generations to come will learn.”*

### How the Government can help reduce dog attacks

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Figure 11: How can the Government help to reduce dog attacks?

Respondents could select multiple responses for this question. Most support came for increasing public awareness about safety around dogs (82%) and introducing a dog owner licensing system (75%). Some respondents also suggested other ways the Government can reduce dog attacks.

#### The Government should provide nationwide education for all dog owners

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Figure 12: Suggested other ways the Government can help to reduce dog attacks

Respondents suggested the Government intervene by providing education for owners (28%), restrict breeding/sales (19%), and incentivise or enforce dog registration (15%).

*“Dogs live with and amongst us so educate the owners as to their responsibility, and also non-owners on how they can stay safe and not aggravate a situation.”*

## Information on dog attack incidences

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Figure 13: Has your dog ever bitten a person or animal?

Respondents could only select ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ for this question. The vast majority of respondents indicated their dog had never bitten anyone (77%), but a small number indicated that there had been an incident (7%). 16 per cent of respondents gave no response to this question.

Respondents that indicated their dog had bitten an animal or person were then asked what the circumstances were and whether or not the relevant council was informed.

### Typical circumstances surrounding attacks

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Figure 14: Why did your dog bite?

The majority noted that their dog had gotten into a fight with another dog (32%). Other common responses included that their dog had been provoked by a human (18%), and that their dog was hunting (18%).

### Was the relevant council notified?

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Figure 15: If your dog has bitten, was the council informed? Why/why not?

Councils were typically not notified (87% of the time). When respondents explained why the council had not been notified, they stated that they did not believe it necessary to do so.

*“No I didn’t inform council because it is none of their business. My dog bit one of my chickens. This is normal dog behaviour and has since been prevented through training and exposure to the rest of the chickens.”*

*“My dog was attacked by another dog (smaller one) and defended herself. Minor injuries to both dogs. No council was not informed. Other owner apologised.”*

*“The bite was in reaction to be[ing] attacked by another dog and I was trying to get her out of the situation… Waste of time contacting the council. I could have had my own dog destroyed because they may not understand the situation.”*

1. Demographics of survey respondents

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| Did the respondent own a dog? |
|  | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| Yes | 2,347 | 76% |
| No | 455 | 15% |
| No response given | 294 | 9% |
| **Total respondents** | **3,096** |  |

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| Key characteristics of respondents |
|  | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| They were a dog owner | 2,594 | 84% |
| They were concerned about dog attacks | 1,482 | 48% |
| They were a parent | 1,166 | 38% |
| They had an animal that had been attacked by a dog | 828 | 27% |
| They had been attacked by a dog  | 593 | 19% |
| No answer given | 58 | 2% |
| **Total respondents** | **3,096** |   |

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| Characteristics of the dog |
|  | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| Registered | 2,546 | 98% |
| Microchipped | 2,456 | 94% |
| Neutered | 2,013 | 77% |
| **Total respondents** | **2,601** |   |

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| Where did they get their dog from? |
|  | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| Breeder | 1,142 | 47% |
| Animal Shelter | 581 | 24% |
| Online or newspaper ad | 311 | 13% |
| Friend or relative | 256 | 11% |
| Pet shop | 83 | 3% |
| Found as stray | 49 | 2% |
| **Total respondents** | **2,422** |  |

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| What was their main reason for getting a dog? |
|  | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| Companionship | 2,017 | 82% |
| Competition | 308 | 12% |
| Protection | 48 | 2% |
| Work | 43 | 2% |
| Hunting | 39 | 2% |
| Assistance | 14 | 1% |
| **Total respondents** | **2,469** |  |

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| Had they completed an obedience course? |
|  | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| Yes, it was useful | 1,587 | 65% |
| No, we don't want to | 563 | 23% |
| No, but we will soon | 153 | 6% |
| Yes, but it was useless | 139 | 6% |
| **Total respondents** | **2,442** |  |

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| Age |
|  | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| 15 or younger | 15 | <1% |
| 16-25  | 321 | 10% |
| 26-35  | 623 | 20% |
| 36-45  | 659 | 21% |
| 46-55  | 678 | 22% |
| 56-65  | 403 | 13% |
| 66-75 | 166 | 5% |
| 76 or older  | 25 | 1% |
| Unspecified  | 206 | 7% |
| **Total respondents** | **3,096** |  |

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| Were they from a main centre? |
|  | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| Main centre | 1,656 | 53% |
| Outside main centres | 1,440 | 47% |
| **Total** | **3,096** |   |

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| What district were they from? |
|  | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| Auckland | 821 | 27% |
| Christchurch City | 289 | 9% |
| Wellington City | 120 | 4% |
| Tauranga City | 112 | 4% |
| Dunedin City | 88 | 3% |
| Manawatu District | 82 | 3% |
| Waikato District | 79 | 3% |
| Hamilton City | 75 | 2% |
| Waimakariri District | 61 | 2% |
| Lower Hutt City | 54 | 2% |
| Selwyn District | 54 | 2% |
| Far North District | 53 | 2% |
| New Plymouth District | 53 | 2% |
| Rotorua District | 49 | 2% |
| Upper Hutt City | 48 | 2% |
| Nelson City | 39 | 1% |
| Invercargill City | 37 | 1% |
| Western Bay of Plenty District | 37 | 1% |
| Waipa District | 34 | 1% |
| Hastings District | 30 | 1% |
| Horowhenua District | 28 | 1% |
| Timaru District | 28 | 1% |
| Taupo District | 27 | 1% |
| Porirua City | 26 | 1% |
| Central Hawke's Bay District | 25 | 1% |
| Kaipara District | 25 | 1% |
| Palmerston North City | 25 | 1% |
| Tasman District | 24 | 1% |
| Marlborough District | 22 | 1% |
| Matamata-Piako District | 20 | 1% |
| Napier City | 19 | 1% |
| South Taranaki District | 18 | 1% |
| Southland District | 18 | 1% |
| Gisborne District | 16 | 1% |
| Grey District | 16 | 1% |
| Other districts | 213 | 7% |
| Unspecified | 331 | 11% |
| **Total** | **3,096** |  |

1. No graphic provided as respondents generally only offered one explanation for why dog breeds are the biggest contributing factor. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)