

## ACT Companion Dog Club

# Dog Arousal and Aggression Policy<sup>1</sup>

Approved 26 July 2016

### 1. Introduction

The ACT Companion Dog Club promotes responsible dog ownership and dog training. The Club recognises that from time to time members will bring dogs to the Club as a part of their efforts to overcome behavioural problems including reactivity and aggression. Further, it is recognised that some dogs may become highly aroused when exposed to the stress and excitement of certain club activities and may pose a risk to other club members and their dogs.

As far as possible the Club aims to help members to train their dogs to behave appropriately. However the safety of members and their dogs is paramount at all times. Accordingly, this policy provides a framework to identify and document incidents where dogs behave inappropriately so that (i) action can be taken to protect the safety of members and their dogs and (ii) action can also be taken, where possible, to support the education of members and the training and management of dogs involved in incidents.

This policy applies to incidents that occur on the Club's grounds or at approved events at other locations with the following exceptions: incidents that occur during (i) Dogs ACT sanctioned club events (such as obedience and agility trials) or (ii) Australian Flyball Association sanctioned club events. These are covered by *Dogs ACT Regulations – Part 17 – Aggressive Dogs* and the *Rules and Policies of the Australian Flyball Association – Section 9.3 – Aggressive Dogs* respectively.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Policy context

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Club's *Work health and safety policy* and *Club rules* including protocols applying to the use of off-lead areas.

### 3. Definitions

#### *Club official*

A club instructor, member of a Sub-committee, member of the Committee, session manager or office manager.

#### *Committee*

The Club's Main Committee as per section 12 of the Club's Constitution.

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<sup>1</sup> This policy supercedes the Club's *Aggressive Dog Policy* (2000) and all subsequent amendments and the Agility Sub-Committee's *Reactive Dogs Policy* (2011).

<sup>2</sup> See <http://dogsact.org.au/about-us/rules-and-regulations/> and <http://www.flyball.org.au/rules/> .

### *Incident book*

A written record kept by the Club of incidents including the date, parties involved and accounts of the incident.<sup>3</sup>

### *Minor incident*

An incident where:

- (i) a dog persistently harasses another dog; or
- (ii) a dog makes, or attempts to make, inappropriate physical contact with another dog but does not cause injury; or
- (iii) a dog persistently lunges or runs towards another dog in an aroused or aggressive manner but does not make physical contact; or
- (iv) a dog behaves aggressively towards a person, but not so as they reasonably fear that they are going to be attacked; or
- (v) a similar act of arousal or aggression where no injury or reasonable fear of injury occurs.

### *Review group*

A panel of three instructors comprising (i) an instructor serving on the relevant Sub-committee relating to the incident, (ii) an instructor serving on the Committee, and (iii) one other instructor. Each instructor shall have at least five years experience at the Club, preferably in the activity or sport relating to a documented incident. Members of the review group must not be a party to the documented incident or a witness to the documented incident.

### *Major incident*

An incident where:

- (i) a dog causes injury to a person or dog; or
- (ii) a dog behaves in such a way that a person reasonably fears they are going to be attacked or injured by that dog; or
- (iii) a dog behaves in an aroused or aggressive manner that is more serious than a minor incident.

### *President*

The person performing the role of President as per section 15(a) of the Constitution.

### *Secretary*

The person performing the role of Secretary as per section 15(c) of the Constitution.

### *Sub-committee*

A sub-committee approved by the Committee as per section 17(x) of the Constitution.

### *WHS co-ordinator*

The person on the Committee formally responsible for monitoring the Club's work health and safety obligations.

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<sup>3</sup> Incident Books are kept in the club office and in the agility shed. Incidents that occur during agility activities should be recorded in the Agility Incident Book. All other incidents should be recorded in the office Incident Book.

#### **4. Responsibilities of club members**

Club members are responsible for the behaviour of the dogs under their care on the club grounds and must strive to minimise the risk of unsafe or inappropriate behaviour by complying with club rules and following the direction of club officials.

Failure to comply with a formal direction arising from an incident under this policy may be grounds for cessation of membership under section 9 of the Constitution.

#### **5. Dealing with incidents**

Parties involved in an incident and any club officials in the vicinity should attempt to defuse an incident as quickly as possible drawing on their own skill, experience and judgment. Care should be taken to avoid injury to people or dogs when defusing an incident.

A club official may direct any party involved in an incident to take immediate action as soon as the incident is defused to minimise any further risk to members and their dogs. Such action may include, but is not limited to, removing a dog from a specific part of the grounds (including a class environment), leaving the grounds completely, and prohibiting access to the grounds until further notice.

Any club official who issues an oral direction to a party involved in an incident that places restrictions on further class involvement or grounds access must confirm the direction in writing to the affected party as soon as practicable after the incident and no later than 24 hours after the incident.

To minimise further risks to members and/or their dogs, any dog involved in an incident must not be left unattended on the grounds after an incident.

#### **6. Documenting incidents**

Responsibility for documenting an incident rests with a club official that is present during an incident. A club official may use their judgement in determining whether an incident of a minor nature should be documented taking into account the definition of 'minor incident' and the context in which the incident occurred. All major incidents must be documented (see 'Definitions' above).

Where no club official is present at an incident, a member may report the incident to a club official.

Where a club official deems that documentation is warranted, accounts of incidents must be documented in the Club's Incident Book.

Parties directly involved in an incident must be informed if the incident is documented and they must be treated with courtesy at all times.

The club official who takes responsibility for documenting an incident should provide an opportunity for the parties involved and any other witnesses to the incident to submit written accounts of the incident as soon as possible after the event.

Written accounts should identify who was involved, where the incident happened, what happened, what immediate action (if any) was taken and by whom.

## **7. Review of documented incidents**

The club official who documents an incident or receives an account of an incident from a club member must notify the convenor of the relevant Sub-committee responsible for the activity or sport relating to a documented incident and the Committee's Work Health and Safety (WHS) co-ordinator as soon as practicable after the event. The WHS co-ordinator and relevant convenor will jointly determine whether the incident is deemed 'minor' or 'major' according to the definitions in this policy.

The WHS co-ordinator and relevant convenor may deem an incident 'minor' and consider that the action taken at the time of the incident was adequate and agree that no further action is required. Alternatively, they may elect to refer a minor incident to a review group for investigation. All incidents deemed 'major' must be referred to a review group.

All incidents documented in the Incident Book must be reported to the next available Committee meeting in accordance with the Club's work, health and safety obligations irrespective of referral to a review group. This is the responsibility of the WHS co-ordinator.

A review group must be established and convened as soon as practicable after the WHS co-ordinator and relevant convenor have determined that a review is necessary. It is the responsibility of the WHS co-ordinator to ensure that this happens and to liaise with the review group on the progress of the review. The WHS co-ordinator and relevant convenor shall nominate the members of the review group subject to the definition in this policy.

When reviewing an incident the review group will:

- (i) attempt to contact all parties involved in the incident to inform them of the review;
- (ii) consider the details of the incident as documented in the Incident Book;
- (iii) consider any further information sought or provided by any party involved in the incident;
- (iv) consider any further information sought or provided by witnesses to the incident;
- (v) consider any information sought or provided by veterinary or medical practitioners involved after the incident;
- (vi) take into account any other information the review group considers relevant.<sup>4</sup>

The review group will then, drawing on their own experience and training, prepare a report and make written recommendation(s) to the President.

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<sup>4</sup> In the case of dog bites, the review group may refer to Dr Ian Dunbar's Dog Bite Scale.

Recommendations may include, but are not limited to, any of the following:

- (i) that no further action is taken;
- (ii) that the people involved are counselled;
- (iii) that changes are made to club policies and/or practices;
- (iv) that specific management strategies are put in place during class activities;
- (v) that the dog is required to wear a 'give me space' vest (or similar 'high visibility' training equipment) while on the grounds;<sup>5</sup>
- (vi) that the dog is required to wear a muzzle while on the grounds;
- (vii) that the dog is required to be leashed at all times on the grounds;
- (viii) that the dog is banned from certain parts of the grounds (eg off-lead areas);
- (ix) that the dog is banned from certain training activities for a prescribed or indefinite period;
- (x) that the dog is required to pass a prescribed 'temperament' test before commencing or recommencing certain training activities;
- (xi) that the owner is advised to seek advice from a recognised professional (eg veterinarian behaviourist or qualified behavioural trainer) at the owner's cost;<sup>6</sup>
- (xii) that the dog is banned from the club grounds for a prescribed or indefinite period; and/or
- (xiii) that the dog may only return to the club grounds and/or club activities following reassessment by a recognised professional acceptable to the Club.

It is recognised that some of these recommendations will preclude some dogs (and their owners) from participating in club activities. In weighing up the effect of any recommendations, the safety of members and their dogs must be the paramount consideration.

## **8. Role of the President and the Committee**

The President must table the review group's report at the next available Committee meeting for the Committee's consideration. If this meeting is unduly delayed and urgent action is required to ensure the safety of members and their dogs, the President may issue an interim direction to a member or members involved in an incident based on the recommendation(s) of the review group. An interim direction may be given orally but must be followed-up in writing within 24 hours.

At the next available meeting, the Committee may endorse, modify or revoke any interim direction given by the President and any recommendation(s) made by the review group. As soon as practicable after the meeting, the President (or their delegate) must inform the parties involved in the incident of the outcome of the Committee's decision. This may be done orally but must be followed-up in writing within 24 hours.

The President (or their delegate) may also communicate the outcome of the review process and the Committee's decision to other club officials on a case-by-case basis to ensure the safety of club officials, members and their dogs.

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<sup>5</sup> Such as a yellow bandana recommended under the Yellowdog Australia Project (see <http://www.yellowdog-australia.k9events.com/>).

<sup>6</sup> See the club's brochure *Canine behavioural training services for members* for professionals recommended by the Club.

## **9. Implementation of directions**

After a period of not less than two months after the President (or their delegate) has communicated the Committee's decision a member who is subject to a direction may apply to the Committee (through the Secretary) to modify or revoke the direction. The Committee may make a decision to uphold, modify or revoke the direction or refer the matter to a review group for further consideration and recommendation.

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