

Dear 54th New Zealand Parliament, How many more lives must be lost or ruined before meaningful reform of dog laws occurs?

Another preventable tragedy has taken a life - the fourth fatal dog attack in four years. These incidents are not isolated; they are symptoms of systemic failure. Urgent, evidence-based, and systemic reform of New Zealand's dog legislation is needed, now!

New Zealand's legal framework for managing dogs is no longer fit for purpose. The Dog Control Act 1996 is outdated, inconsistently applied, and misaligned with modern animal behaviour science and evidence-based risk management. The Dog Code of Welfare issued under the Animal Welfare Act 1999, hasn't been reviewed since it was first introduced in 2010. The Code fails to set standards and educate on known risk factors for dog bite incidents including negative early life experiences and inadequate puppy socialisation, irresponsible breeding standards, unsuitable housing and punishment-based training.

These gaps translate directly into welfare failures and public safety risks: poorly socialised puppies, unregulated breeding, and dogs entering communities already at heightened behavioural risk through no fault of their own. Without clear, enforceable standards and accountability, these risks persist - placing both dogs and people in harm's way.

We urge the government to commit to three essential reforms:

- 1. A comprehensive overhaul of the Dog Control Act 1996.** Legislative reform must replace outdated breed-specific provisions with evidence-based, nationally consistent risk management tools focused on individual dog behaviour and responsible ownership. It must provide clear statutory guidance for councils to ensure consistent investigations and enforcement; mandate national data collection on dog bite incidents to inform prevention strategies; and integrate mandatory breeder licensing and puppy traceability within the Act.
- 2. Strong, enforceable dog breeding regulations.** These must include: minimum welfare requirements, minimum rehoming age, limits on breeding frequency, and safeguards against inherited disease. This is needed to enable enforcement and reduce poorly bred and inadequately socialised dogs entering communities.
- 3. Modernisation of the Dog Code of Welfare.** A revised Code, drafted in 2023 by SPCA in collaboration with a cross-sector working group, was provided to the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. However, work to progress this was paused at the direction of Associate Minister of Agriculture (Animal Welfare), Andrew Hoggard. Work must resume immediately on updating the companion animal codes.

Central government must commit to ongoing funding for nationwide desexing initiatives as a core component of broader dog-bite prevention framework, recognising that reducing dog overpopulation and unmanaged breeding is a critical, preventative measure that contributes to protecting both communities and dogs.

**New Zealanders deserve a system that keeps people safe. Dogs deserve one that protects their welfare.
Lives depend on it.**

