

Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Ref: Submission - Animal Welfare Bill Review 2018

Attention: Julia Knight - Committee Secretary

Diana's Story

Following a telephone conversation with the Member for Brennan, Tony Sievers and a letter from Tony, containing a copy of your extension letter, we write now to the committee, outlining the unfortunate and unacceptable circumstances of a dog attack on Diana Thompson in our home street on Thursday 22/03/2018, at approx. 9am.

Diana had just about completed a ¾ hour walk with our pet greyhound (on a leash), walking up our street, when she heard a gate being unchained, and as has been a normal practice for her, immediately stopped and looked ahead to see this solid grey dog run into the street and upon seeing Diana and our dog, immediately ran straight to them, and with Diana turning sideways, it attacked her arm at the wrist and locked it's jaws while shaking vigorously, to the point whereby Diana was pulled off balance to the ground, face, nose mouth first, breaking teeth and then shaken and dragged around, whereby, both bones in the arm were crushed completely, with flesh and fatty tissue ripped from her wrist onto the road and her clothing, three tendons severed, damage to the arteries and nerves, with one artery now not functioning (but blood being supplied through the main artery which was damaged but not severed).

May I just add that throughout this whole attack, Diana was screaming in absolute terror, and will remember it for the rest of her life, as her darkest moment.

She was alone in the street. She honestly thought that her hand was being ripped off her arm.

A man in the house alongside the dog's home, was packing up his hose to move, and heard noises in the street, by the time he came to look and unlocked his own gate, Diana was at that point obviously in shock, writhing in agony, holding her near severed hand with her left hand and screaming. He had his wife ring the ambulance, and ripped off his shirt, wrapping Diana's wrist, then sitting in the street and cuddling her to his chest and waited for the ambulance to arrive. On arrival, it took some time to care for her, tend to the severe wound and supplied much pain relief then and on the way to the Emergency Royal Darwin Hospital.

She was operated on that night to have all the soft tissue repaired and stitched inside the arm, including tendons, nerves, artery, etc, some temporary setting of the shattered bones, with temporary external brace bolted to her arm.

This was followed by **three more operations** during the nearly 3 weeks that she spent in hospital. The biggest operation having her in the theatre for over 4 hours, while the surgeons applied plates to both bones, still not being able to secure all the bone but laying/setting pieces in position, whereby hopefully they will knit together.

As there was not much skin and tissue left to cover all the surgeons' work, skin was taken from her thigh to graft the area.

The next operation had the surgeons wire the plates together for extra security of the set, and to graft/stitch and tidy up the skin grafting. More operation(s) are envisaged in the future, and although the tone is positive talk, there are no guarantees of success for Diana's complete recovery. Presently, Diana's arm is in a large cast from fingers to above the elbow, must be supported and cannot have pressure put on it.

Diana is now home, and life has changed completely for Diana and our household, with this being life for the next 4 to 5 months.

The dog also attacked our greyhound and tore her body in 4 places. She spent three days at the Vet Hospital and was operated on/stitched up and put on pain relief and anti-biotics. Costs \$900+

Where are we now?

Diana was the only witness to the attack, saw the dog run out of the gate that was opened by the female owner, who had put her child in the car to go out, and opened the gate without restraining her dog. The woman went to her car or house and obviously did not know what was happening.

Council Action: Police are not involved at all, although they attended and collected Diana's belongings from the road. Council has complete control of dog bylaws and controls.

Council rangers took our dog to the Vet Hospital, commenced their investigation and removed the offending dog to the pound. Investigation has been ongoing and Diana gave them her statement – identifying the dog that attacked her and gave the address where it lives.

We believe that the owners will not give their permission to have their dog euthanized and want it back home.

Medical bills are mounting and at present we do not seem to have any redress in any direction, except for a civil case, which we might or might not win, and legal advice is that it could be very costly, with only medical bills to claim, with no loss of future income with Diana's age (77).

Not much help for Diana – but what about the FUTURE

We realise that presently, the NT Legislative Assembly has a committee working on the Animal Welfare Bill Review 2018, and we are not about to try and tell the NT Government, Palmerston Council, Legal Profession, NT Police, how to start looking after people in our communities of the Northern Territory, old people, young people, especially people who

work hard, spend money in the community, support Territory Organisations in charitable fundraising & sporting ventures, pay tax, rates, VOTE at all elections and listen to the consistent voices of all the potential officials standing in all elections on how they are going to 'FIGHT FOR' AND 'STAND UP' for the people and communities of the NT, Darwin, Palmerston and wherever, BUT we do want to tell them to Start Doing – Working, on the issues that affect us every day in our communities here in the NT.

There are a only a few that are really quite urgent – one is a DOG ACT of some form that gives the community SECURITY and protects us all from potential attack and harm (PROBABLE these days – and getting worse). When many people living in our area mention that they do not feel secure walking around the neighbourhood, then we do have a problem.

All the surgeons and staff at both the Royal Darwin Hospital and Darwin Private, have terrible stories of continual medical care and surgery to constant dog attacks. NOT BITES – ATTACKS.

Suggestions

After 40 years in the NT, it is totally unacceptable for Diana Thompson to be viciously attacked by a guard dog that was unsecured and allowed to run out of an open gate.

Please give regard to the following.....

1. **Criminal offence** for a dog owner for any attack on a person, in a public place by their unsecured dog.
2. **Major penalties** for the above, that actually have teeth!
3. **Immediate euthanizing** of a dog that attacks a person in a public place.
4. **Insurance** – Third Party Personal as part of all dog registrations, to pay for ALL costs.
5. **Education** - Many owners have no idea at all about the capability of their dog to attack a person, and do not know dogs at all. According to police and council, a large number of dog owners in the Darwin and Palmerston Shires have them for security against house and car thefts. Never walk them, or associate as part of the family.
6. **Heavy Fines** for people not restraining their dogs at any time (behind gates or on leads). The \$100 on the spot fines advertised around the community are a joke, which many do not abide. We walk every day and constantly come up against dogs (some vicious running free with their owners of lead, many are the same people, and do not respond to advice and those that do tend to take offence at being told that, people feel insecure when coming up upon an unsecured dog, who according to some experts may sense the fear and could put a person in jeopardy, and probably have in some attack cases, who knows. LET'S DO SOMETHING REALLY GOOD IN COMMITTEE TO FIX IT!
7. **Fencing** - Start a gradual standard whereby, **all dogs are kept fenced to the sides and rear of a house....a) they won't run out when the front gate is unlocked and opened, b) they can still bark at potential thieves, etc.** When we walk through Gunn streets, where most houses have the side fences at the front corner of both sides of

the house, all the dogs still bark and make a fuss as you walk past, or approach the front of the house.

Summary

Both Diana and myself are totally dumbfounded by the lack of any real controls, and find this incident totally unacceptable for our Territory community that we have lived in and loved for so many years.

We feel unsafe and insecure in the NT for the really the first time ever, having someone come into our house 4 months ago, while Diana was in the backyard, stole her purse, house and car keys and the car out of the front driveway.

Now this vicious and savage attack in our own street.

You don't have to try and follow the rest of Australia, other states. Our Councils, although the rangers do as good a job as possible with the current by-laws, don't seem equipped to handle the legal ramifications of this Dog Security issue.

These problems have been around for too long and need a strong NT Government approach to do it now – you will have support from the majority of the community.

The Australian Veterinary Association (supported by NT Vets) estimates that there are more than 100,000 attacks and harassments in Australia each year against people and that only 20% get reported.

The AVA advise that In 2015-2016, of those recorded, Darwin alone – 216 people were attacked by dogs. 2016, in a 3 month period, 30 people attacked in Darwin alone.

Too many, and those people had no real support from our governing bodies. They all have to work through these episodes on their own, just like Diana and the family, with NO JUSTICE!!!!

19/03/2018

Diana Thompson & Paul Sedman



Mobile





