

3 November 2023

For immediate release

## **ABTC responds to the Government's ban on XL Bully type dogs**

While action must be taken to protect people and other animals from dangerously out of control dogs, the ABTC disagrees with the continued focus on specific breeds and types rather than a focus on the most significant factors that result in dogs that are out of control and exhibiting behaviour that is dangerous.

The ABTC views it to be unethical and unacceptable to ban an entire type of dog based on looks alone, on the basis of the actions of individual animals. Dog breed is generally a poor predictor of individual behaviour (Morrill et al. 2022) or behavioural tendencies (Hammond and Rowland 2022). Classifying types of dogs as dangerous can perpetuate stereotypes and impact public perceptions and expectations regarding the behaviour of certain dogs (Clarke, Mills and Cooper 2016). Critically, banning breeds has not been an effective approach since the introduction of the Dangerous Dogs Act in 1991. The welfare sector and research experts have been clear that adding more types or breeds of dogs to section one of the Act will not be effective in preventing incidents.

While attention must be paid to identified breed tendencies and suitable humane and ethical interventions provided to reduce the risk of dogs developing undesirable behaviours; the importance of the human factor and underlying issues in the dangerous dog equation continues to receive insufficient attention. Unscrupulous breeders continue to breed dogs with little regard for health or temperament. Irresponsible guardians may fail to meet their individual dog's needs, provide adequate environmental proofing, properly manage or teach socially appropriate behaviours. In some cases, anti-social behaviour involving dogs is actively sought after.

In line with recent statements made by animal welfare and practitioner organisations across the UK, the ABTC supports:

- Legislation that curbs irresponsible 'ownership' and brings dogs and their guardians into review earlier, where there is a concern about instances of dangerous behaviour. Responses should be tailored on a case-by-case basis, with a professional review of the background of the dog and the context of the incident.
- Further support for and broadening the reach of preventative education programmes that highlight caregivers' responsibilities with regard all dogs.

- A thorough assessment of the underlying issues surrounding dog breeding, acquisition and incidents, to create an evidence-base informing effective next steps.

Identifying and tackling the fundamental causes of dog aggression and dogs dangerously out of control requires us to acknowledge and address the social and environmental factors involved.

---

### **Contact**

ABTC email: [info@abtc.org.uk](mailto:info@abtc.org.uk)

### **References**

Morrill, K. et al. (2022) 'Ancestry-inclusive dog genomics challenges popular breed stereotypes', *Science*, 376(6592). [doi:10.1126/science.abk0639](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abk0639)

Hammond, A., Rowland, T., Mills, D. S., & Pilot, M. (2022). Comparison of behavioural tendencies between "dangerous dogs" and other domestic dog breeds – Evolutionary context and practical implications. *Evolutionary Applications*, 15, 1806–1819. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eva.13479>

Clarke, T., Mills, D., & Cooper, J. (2016). "Type" as Central to Perceptions of Breed Differences in Behavior of Domestic Dog. *Society & Animals*, 24(5), 467-485. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685306-12341422>

### **Promoting Excellence in Animal Behaviour and Training**

Registered in 2015, the ABTC (Animal Behaviour and Training Council) is the only UK charity dedicated to ensuring that the approaches used in the field of training and behaviour optimise animal wellbeing. The council sets the standards of knowledge and practical skills needed to be an animal trainer, instructor, behaviourist and other specialist practitioner roles. As an umbrella organisation, ABTC membership is open to all stakeholder organisations in the training and behaviour sector. Engaging with organisations focused on companion animals as well as those that work with and care for a diverse variety of other species, the ABTC has over forty member organisations. For more information visit [www.abtc.org.uk](http://www.abtc.org.uk)