The welfare of dogs – what’s the problem?

Kevin Stafford
Institute of Veterinary, Animal and Biomedical Sciences
Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand
Canine Welfare

- Conflict
- Ignorance
- Difficulty
Conflict

• The Dog
  • Street animal for 15,000 years.
  • Social, mob, scavenger/hunter, omnivore, promiscuous, defaecates freely, barks, fight, bites.

• Society
  • Dogs off the street, in house, silent, clean streets and playing fields, safe
Not a new conflict

- Dog control programmes not new

- Rabies Control in England in 1900s
  - Dog owners versus Chief Veterinary Officer
  - CVO wanted dogs muzzled in public

- Dog attacks forced legislation tightening. In NZ the 1996 Dog Control Act amended 3 times
Local Authority Palmerston North (Figures for 2011-12)

- Registered Dogs 7471
- **Barking dog complaints** 1044
- Roaming dogs 1844
- Dog attacks 117
- Dogs euthanased in pound 189
- Human Population 75000
- 48% believe dogs should be muzzled when in public places – Local Paper Survey 2014
Barking

- **35% of complaints against dogs in Auckland are for barking**
- 42% of cases at a Behaviour Clinic in Auckland presented for problem barking?
- **40% separation anxiety;** 51% territorial
- Barking is particularly irritating to human (worse than lawnmowers, skill saws and babies)

  Flint 2012
Department of Internal Affairs
2009/10

- ACC  9,855 new dog bite claims
- 10,699 ongoing claims previous years
- 24,500 infringements over 30 months – offences against Dog Control Act
- 30 infringements per 100 dogs in Auckland!
Negative impact of dogs

- Social nuisance
  - SPCA Shelters
  - Dog control officers and pounds
  - Dog often cause of complaints to councils (second after rates, traffic)
  - Barking – Biting – Defaecation – Lunging – attacks on dogs/cats/rabbits
  - Killing Kiwis
Why do people have dogs?

- NZ 29% households (Maori 33%, Pakeha 29%)
- Low - Australia 36%, USA 39%, UK 23%
- Average number 1.2 dogs
- 700,000

- Mackay, 2011
Who owns dogs?

- **Age group**
  - *18-24* 36%
  - *25-34* 29%
  - *35-44* 36%
  - *45-54* 37%
  - *55-64* 26%
  - *65-74* 19%
  - *>75* 0%

  - Flint et al., 2010
Reason for having a dog

- Companionship 53%
- For children 16%
- Security 8%
- Relaxation 3%
- Exercise 4%
- Breed/compete/hobby 3%
- Other (work etc) 12%
  - Mackay, 2011
Companionship?

- **Age group**
  - 18-24: 36%
  - 25-34: 29%
  - 35-44: 36%
  - 45-54: 37%
  - 55-64: 26%
  - 65-74: 19%
  - >75: 0%

  - Flint et al., 2010
Companionship – really

- We need a better understanding of why people have a dog?
Companionship

- Utility (children, work, sport, exercise, security)
Companionship

- Market ($1.5 billion in NZ) – dogs are good for you; get one now.
- Dogs need you (SPCA advertisements)
- Normal to have one (family is not complete without dog)
- Company for lonely
- Pairing behaviour
21\textsuperscript{th} century – urbanisation

- The dog as companion?
- The dog as family and support?
- The street dog (Chile)
- Dogs for hire (Japan)

- The dog as economically important
Companion animals

- Reduce loneliness
- Facilitate social interaction
- Health benefits
- Strengthen relationships
- Help those with mental problems
- Protection
People are alone ---- NZ figures

25% of people live alone
44% of households childless
4% women and 5% men lonely all the time,
26% report being lonely in the last 12 months
Can dogs cure this?

Sunday Star Times 11/6/7
Pet Dogs-- Family members

- Wilbur survey of 350 owners
  - 27% family member
  - 17% enjoyed dog not close involved
  - 24% attached but worried about behaviour
  - 19% object – value dogs a nuisance
Companionship – really

- Why own
  - English Bulldog
  - Irish Wolfhound
  - American Pit Bull Terrier

- A mongrel is just as good
Dogs are company!!

Some people identify the dog as more important than a partner (husband, wife)

NZ data 40% very fond of dogs, 7% afraid of dogs, 4% dislike dogs, 8% dogs a threat (Flint 2012)
Companionship

- In Palmerston North 10% are walked daily
- Dog aloneness is a problem
- Are we good for dogs?
Labradors in suburban Melbourne

- 52% walked for half to one hour per day
- 30% less than that or never walked
- Mean time in yard 15.3 hours (3.6 – 24)
- Mean time with person 7.2 hours (0.5-21)
  - (Kobelt 2004)
Separation anxiety

- In North America SA diagnosed in 20–40% of dogs referred to animal behavioural practices
- 14% of dogs presented at veterinary clinics show signs of it
Social Environment

- >4 hours anxiety starts to develop
- 70% dogs live in one dog houses
- One person households risk factor for separation anxiety
- Barking (time alone and no morning walk)
Behaviour problems

- In the USA, 87% of veterinary clients stated that their dog had a behaviour problem (Campbell, 1986)
- In Australia (Melbourne) 65% of dog owners in Melbourne stated that their dog had a behaviour problem (Kobelt, 2004)
Dogs in Melbourne

- 63% too excitable
- 56% jumped on people
- 38% rushed at people
- 32% excessive barking
- 29% constantly running
- 28% digging
- 23% chewing
- 22% nervous
- 18% obsessive likers
  - Kobelt 2004
Thunderstorm Phobia

• In one survey, 40% of dogs suffering from thunderstorm phobia were under one year of age when they first showed signs such as shaking, salivation, loss of bladder and bowel control.
• Many sought humans, became destructive, vocalised, self-mutilated or hid, all indicators of poor welfare
Compulsive disorders

- Tail chasing
- Fly catching
- Flank sucking
- Acral granuloma lick
- Staring
- % affected – severity?
Human-dog relationship

- Behavioural problems may cause the human-dog relationship to deteriorate
  
  - Increase the likelihood of the dog being abused or killed or surrendered to a shelter or pound
  
  - Affect the social milieu in which dog lives – ignored, chained up, never meet visitors, other dogs
Are we good for dogs?

- 30% obese
- 60% overweight
- Breed (labradors, beagles)
- Age (older), sex (neutered)
- Feed (once daily, treats)
- Lack of exercise
- Exacerbate arthritis, hip dysplasia, respiratory
- Predispose to diabetus
- **If dieting – constantly hungry**
Osteoarthritis etc

- In UK 1.3 million dogs affected
- Population 6 million
- 500,000 treated
- 800,000 (13%) in chronic pain
  - Ignorance / poverty

- Cancer in 50% of dogs over 10 years of age
Health – disease

- Hereditary conditions
  - Breed standards
  - English bulldog
  - Pug

- Hip dysplasia
  - Genes
  - Rearing
Human responsibility for animal suffering

- Ignorance - not knowing what to do
- Inexperience – knowing what but not how
- Incompetence – inability to do
- Inconsideration – not caring
- Does poverty feature here?
Ignorance

- How valuable is human versus dog company?
Ignorance

- How dogs experience street life
  - Anxiety, fear, fun
  - Short harsh and brutal but ‘free’
  - Chile, Yemen, Zambia

- Have breeds changed from street dogs
  - What do they need?
Difficulty

- Management of dogs
  - Varied
  - Intrusive research
  - Working dogs NZ
  - Pet dogs
Difficulty

- To assess what a dog needs
  - Exercise
  - Exploration
  - Food experience
  - Social life
  - Predictability
- Motivation
Difficulty

• Can we assess what a specific dog breed needs?
Do dogs need to have fun?

- Assess anxiety – fear – pain
- How happy is Rex?
- Optimism – Pessimism
Animal welfare – 2 basic tenets

- An animal should be free to engage in normal behaviours
- An animal should be free of pain, fear and anxiety.
Many normal dog behaviours are unacceptable to human society.

If allowed to roam dogs will

- Scavenge
- Form packs
- Defaecate freely
- Bark
- Reproduce freely
- Predate
- Fight
Do we really need dogs?

- Silent
- Sweet smelling
- Clean and tidy
- Small faeces
- Loving

- Get a cat
The dog

- An anachronism in modern life
- A cultural issue reinforced by business and the media – cultures change – Asia
- Do families without dogs function better than those with animals?
- Stop advocating dog ownership
- Virtual dogs and farms
Human animal relations

“When you love children and dogs too much, you love them instead of adults” Jean- Paul Sartre
Thank you