



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

Adopted March 2022, Edit Adopted January 2024

## 1. Introduction

The Agility Dog Club of NSW aims to provide a fun, stimulating and welcoming atmosphere for ALL handlers and their dogs. The 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 Agility 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 always paramount. 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 NSW sanctioned club events (such as agility trials) or (ii) ADAA sanctioned club events (such as agility trials). These are covered by *Dogs NSW Aggressive Dog Regulations and Incident Report* and the *Agility Dog Association of Australia Ltd regulations Version 11.2 edition*.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Policy context

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Club's - *Constitution and Club Rules / Ground Rules*.

## 3. Definitions

**Club official:** A club instructor, member of a Sub-committee, member of the Committee or member of the Executive.

**Committee:** The Club's Elected Committee per section 43 of the Club's Constitution.

**Executive:** The Club's Elected Office Bearers as per section 43 of the Club's Constitution.

**Training Sub-Committee:** Comprises the Chief Instructor, Assistant Chief Instructor, and other appointed members.

**Incident book:** A written record of incidents kept by the Club, including the date, parties

involved, and accounts of the incident. Stored in the clubs digital filing system.<sup>3</sup>

## **Dog Arousal and Aggression Policy cont.**

*Definitions cont.*

**Minor Incident:** An incident where:

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

**Review group:** A panel of three or more comprising of Instructors and Club officials.

- a) An instructor serving in the training class relating to the incident,
- b) an instructor serving on the Committee, or a member of the Elected Committee.
- c) Either The Chief Instructor or Assistant Chief Instructor.

Each instructor shall have at least one year's experience at the Club. Members of the review group must not be a party to the documented incident or a witness to the reported incident.

**Major incident:** An incident where:

- a dog causes injury to a person or dog or
- a dog behaves in such a way that a person reasonably fears they are going to be attacked or injured by that dog or
- 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 43(a - (i)) of the Constitution or his delegate.

**Secretary:** The person performing the role of Secretary as per section 43(a - (iv)) of the Constitution.

**Sub-committee:** A sub-committee approved by the Elected Committee as per section 66 of the Constitution.

## **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 34 of the Constitution.

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### **5. Assessing dogs for unsociable or aggressive behaviour**

In some circumstances, the breed of dog is noted for unsociable behaviour. In other situations, the dog may have experienced some trauma (often unknown to the owner) that has triggered the unsociable or aggressive nature of the dog.

During either the Taster of Agility course or an ADC assessment night, all Handlers and Dogs will be assessed regarding the dog(s) ability to socialise with humans and other dogs. This assessment will be completed using two checks.

1. During the assessment, either a member of the Club's Executive or Training Subcommittee will verbally request from the handler an understanding of their dog's socialisation abilities or if the dog is known to have unsociable or aggressive behaviour.
2. Post assessment, but before the dog starts or returns to class, either a member of the Club's Executive or Training Subcommittee will physically meet and greet each dog and make an assessment of the dog's socialisation abilities.

If the dog shows any signs of unsociable or aggressive behaviour, then a member of the Club's Executive or Training Subcommittee may seek a second opinion to assess the dog independently.

Using the guidelines from the review of documented incidents, a member of the Club's Executive or Training Subcommittee shall determine the most appropriate form of management for the dog. This may include a safety-first approach where the dog is required to wear something identifiable <sup>5</sup> or a muzzle until such time as the dog has interacted with both humans and other dogs, and a more accurate assessment can be made.

A dog(s) identified by the ADC as being unsociable or aggressive or have been involved in an incident at the ADC grounds will be continually assessed for signs of behavioural improvement.

### **6. 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 training 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 three (3) business days 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.

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### **7. Documenting incidents**

Responsibility for documenting an incident rests with a club official who is present during the 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 Reports.

Parties directly involved in an incident must be informed if the incident is documented, and they must be always treated with courtesy.

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, but no later than three (3) business days.

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

### **8. Review of documented incidents**

The club official who documents an incident or receives an account of an incident from a club member must notify a member of the Club's Executive or Committee and a member of the Training Sub-Committee as soon as practicable after the event. The Executive and Training Subcommittee will jointly determine whether the incident is deemed 'minor' or 'major' according to the definitions in this policy.

The Executive and Training Sub-Committee 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 Constitution. This is the responsibility of the Training Sub-Committee.

A review group must be established and convened before the next training Thursday session after the Executive and Training Sub-Committee has determined that a review is necessary. It is the responsibility of the Training Sub-Committee to ensure that this happens and to liaise with the review group on the progress of the review. The Executive and Training Sub-Committee shall nominate the review group members subject to this policy's definition.

When reviewing an incident, the review group will:

- Attempt to contact all parties involved in the incident to inform them of the review.
- Consider the details of the incident as documented in the Incident Book.
- Consider any further information sought or provided by any party involved in the incident.
- Consider any further information sought or provided by witnesses to the incident.
- Consider any information sought or provided by veterinary or medical practitioners involved after the incident.
- Take into account any other information the review group considers relevant.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

- a) That no further action is taken.
- b) That the people involved are counselled.
- c) That changes are made to club policies and/or practices.
- d) Specific management strategies are put in place during class activities.
- e) That the dog is required to wear a 'give me space' vest (or similar 'high visibility' training equipment) while on the ground,<sup>5</sup>
- f) That the dog is required to wear a muzzle while on the grounds.
- g) The dog must be leashed at all times on the grounds.
- h) That the dog is banned from certain parts of the grounds (e.g., off-lead areas);
- i) The dog is banned from certain training activities for a prescribed or indefinite period.
- j) The dog is required to pass a prescribed 'temperament' test before commencing or recommencing certain training activities.
- k) The owner is advised to seek advice from a recognised professional (e.g., veterinarian behaviourist or qualified behavioural trainer) at the owner's cost. <sup>6</sup>
- l) That the dog is banned from the club grounds for a prescribed or indefinite period and/or
- m) 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.

### **9. 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 or his delegate 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 before the proceeding Thursday training session.

At the next available meeting, the Committee may endorse, modify, or revoke any interim direction given by the President or his delegate and any recommendation(s) made by the review group. As soon as practicable after the meeting, the President or his 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 three (3) business days.

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.

## ***Dog Arousal and Aggression Policy cont.***

### **10. Implementation of directions**

After a period of not less than three 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 via email) 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.

**Review Date:** This policy is to be reviewed in December 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> This policy supersedes the Club's *Ground Rules & Operating Procedures* (2019) and all subsequent amendments and the Club's *Operating Procedures*.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.dogsnsw.org.au/members/regulations/> and <https://adaa.com.au/rules-and-regs/>.

<sup>3</sup> Incident Records are kept digitally in the Club's online storage platform. Incidents that occur during training and Club activities should be recorded in the Club Incident Report forms. Incidents at Club Trials will be recorded in the affiliate's reports.

<sup>4</sup> In the case of dog bites, the review group may refer to Dr Ian Dunbar's Dog Bite Scale. A copy of which is located at the end of this document.

<sup>5</sup> **Utilising the ADC Yellow Attire System.** or Such as a yellow bandana recommended under the Yellow Dog Australia Project (see <http://www.yellowdog-australia.k9events.com/>). Or prescribed Club Yellow Awareness attire.

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