

Child attack dog 'not pit bull'

The owner of a dog which was put down after it bit a child has disputed reports it was an illegal pit bull.

Brian McCartan said the animal was a long-legged bull mastiff, but because it bit a child, the animal had to be put down.

Surgeons are considering how much of the boy's ear can be repaired after he was attacked in south Belfast.

The 11-year-old had part of his upper ear lobe bitten off at Upper Stanfield Street on Thursday.

He was attacked as he stroked his friend's dog. He is being treated at the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald.

Mr McCartan said the dog had to be put down after the attack.

However, he was upset at claims that the dog was an illegal pit bull type, when, in fact, it was a legal animal.

"It is a bull mastiff. It is not a dangerous dog. It is not a pit bull," he said.

'Family pet'

"I have had it for six years. I have reared it with all my kids. It is a family pet. I have walked my dog for six years. The police have even seen my dog," Mr McCartan said.

"If it had been a pit bull, I would have been arrested and it would have been taken from me. I would have been arrested yesterday, if it had been a pit bull."

Legislation governing dangerous dogs is very unclear.

Belfast City Council which is responsible for enforcement, said there have been no prosecutions for possession of a pit bull, because it is so difficult to prove that the dog has been bred specifically for fighting.

Animal charity, the USPCA, said the dog had been voluntarily surrendered to them and had been put down.

USPCA chief executive Stephen Philpott said part of the child's ear had to be retrieved from the dog's stomach.

"Police contacted us. They then asked us to try and get that animal to a veterinary surgeon and to get the ear, if it could be retrieved, to the Ulster Hospital," he said.

"That procedure was started. But our officers were stood down when the hospital told us that, in their opinion, that would not be possible.

"We were then told to basically help with an evidence gathering situation and to retrieve any foreign matter from the dog. That was done last night."

It has been illegal to own pit bull terriers in Northern Ireland since 1976 as they are a proscribed breed under the Dangerous Dogs Act. However, it is still legal to keep the breed in the Republic of Ireland.

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