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Fatal dog attack an accident: father, George Bourke

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THE father of the three-year-old girl mauled to death by a pack of dogs at the home of her babysitter said yesterday that no one was to blame for the fatal attack.

"The dog attack was an accident and nobody's fault," said George Bourke, the father of Ruby-Lea, who died on Wednesday morning when she was mauled by as many as four bull-mastiff crossbreeds at the home of Ron and Lorraine Conlon in Whitton, in the NSW Riverina.

Ruby-Lea's younger sister, 16-month-old Lilly, was also injured in the attack. She was in a stable condition in Wagga Wagga Base Hospital last night, with puncture wounds to her face and body.

His former partner and the mother of the two girls, Tanya White, has remained by Lilly's bedside since she was admitted to hospital in a serious condition yesterday.

Ms White, who is pregnant with current partner Justin Douglas's child, had left her daughters in the care of Lorraine Conlon while she went shopping.

Soon after, neighbours Doug and Marleen Aliende heard screaming and barking.

When they went to investigate, they were attacked by the pack of dogs. Ruby-Lea was already dead, but the couple managed to save Lilly.

Ms Conlon also suffered minor injuries in the attack, and had collapsed in the living room where the attack occurred.

It is understood Ms White, 23, moved to the small town of Whitton, population 350, 12 months ago.

Yesterday, friends said her partner, Mr Douglas, was consoling his long-time friend "Lorrie", saying he believed the attack was an accident and not her fault.

Three of the dogs died after being tranquillised following the attack. Police are seeking a court order to have the fourth dog put down, but said it was too early to say whether the owner would face any charges over the attack.

According to the Australian Veterinary Association, the three most recent fatal maulings involving children in NSW have been in rural areas: one in Warren in 2006, one in Eden in 2005 and the latest one in Whitton.

Most fatal maulings -- the AVA claims a national toll of 12 since 2000 -- have been in the houses or back yards of family, friends or another known party.

The NSW Government yesterday defended its dog laws, which are administered by local council rangers.

"We have the toughest dog safety laws in Australia, and if dog owners are found to be negligent they can face two years in prison and fines up to \$55,000," said Acting Minister for Local Government Michael Daley. "The best way to ensure dog safety is through responsible pet ownership."

Councils or the police can declare a dog dangerous, regardless of its breed if it has attacked a person or animal without provocation.

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