



Preventing dog bites: it takes two to tango

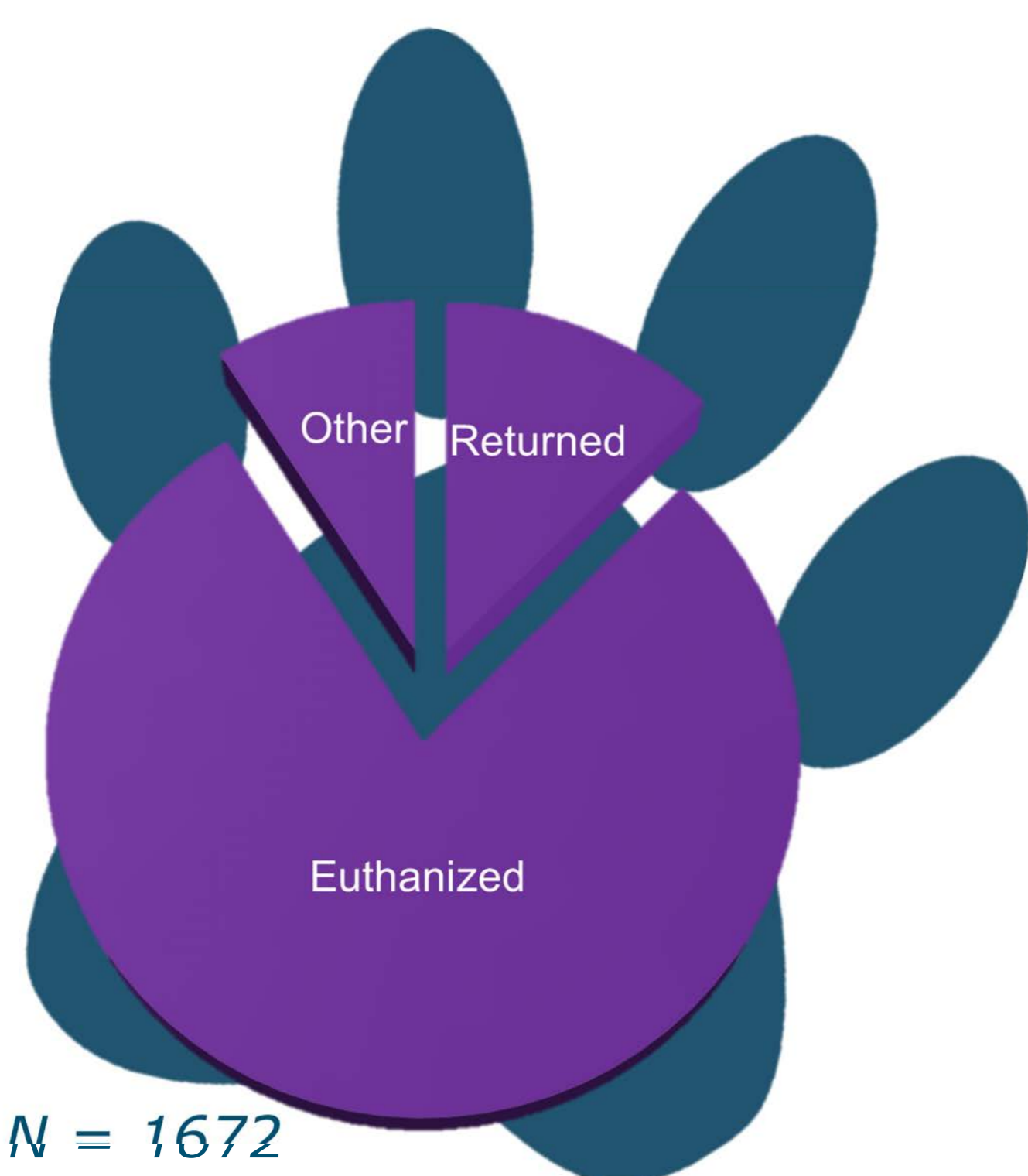
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Objective: to investigate the effectiveness of BSL (pit bull ban) in the Netherlands

Introduction Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) prohibits breeding and ownership of 'aggressive' dog breeds/types in order to reduce injuries and deaths from dog bites. In the Netherlands, BSL prohibiting dogs of the pit bull terrier type was introduced in 1993 after three fatal bite incidents with such dogs involving children.

BSL is increasingly criticised and in 2007 its effectiveness was investigated (after this, the law was abolished). The first part of the evaluation (reported elsewhere*) concluded that (serious) biting is not breed specific and that eliminating certain breeds found to be common biters is neither practicable nor desirable. In order to shed a light on the effectiveness of BSL from another angle, details of lawsuits of confiscated pit bulls and criminal records of pit bull owners were investigated (2000-2006).

Results

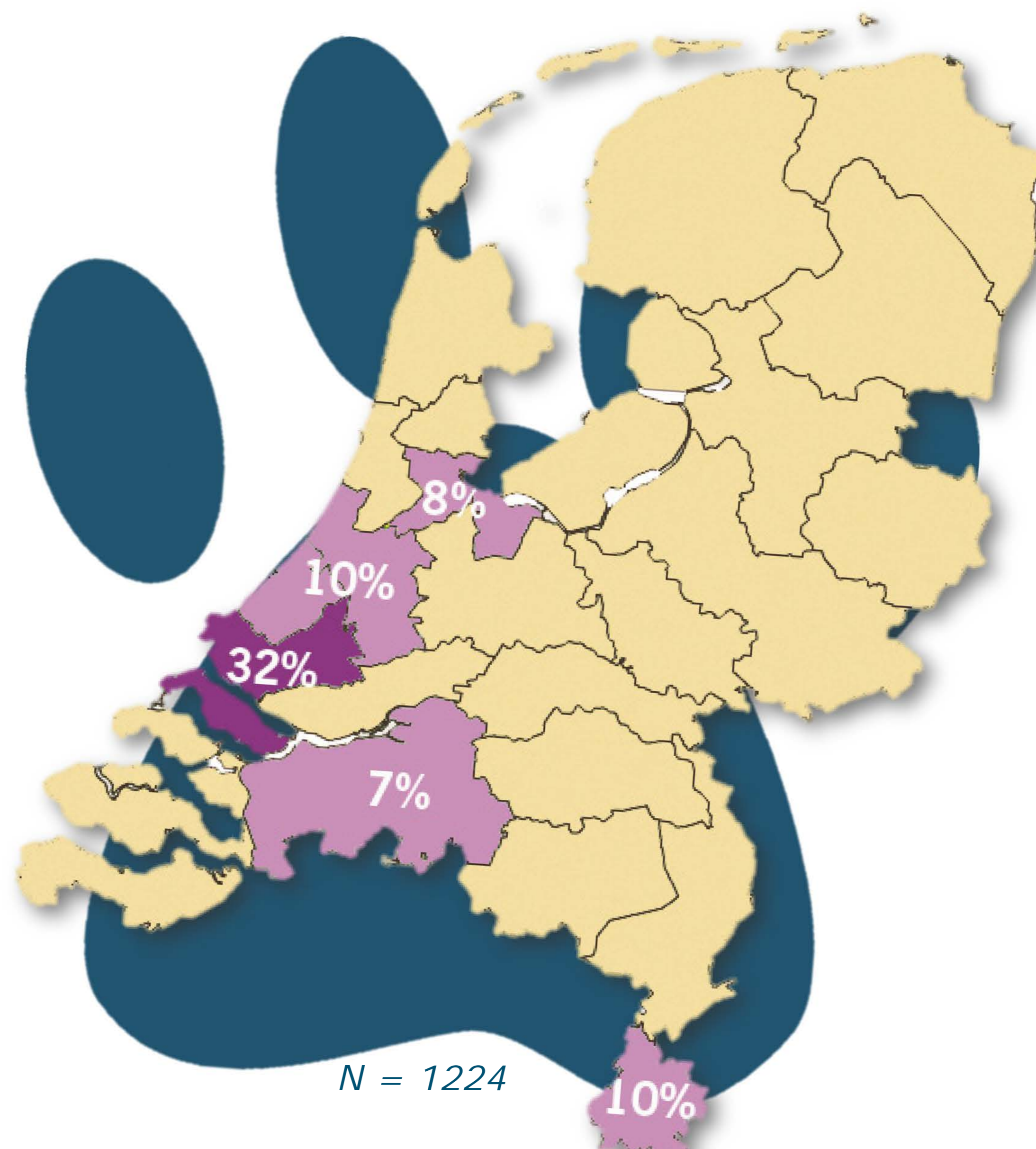


1: Destination of confiscated dogs

79% of pit bulls are euthanized, meaning they are considered an illegal and dangerous pit bull

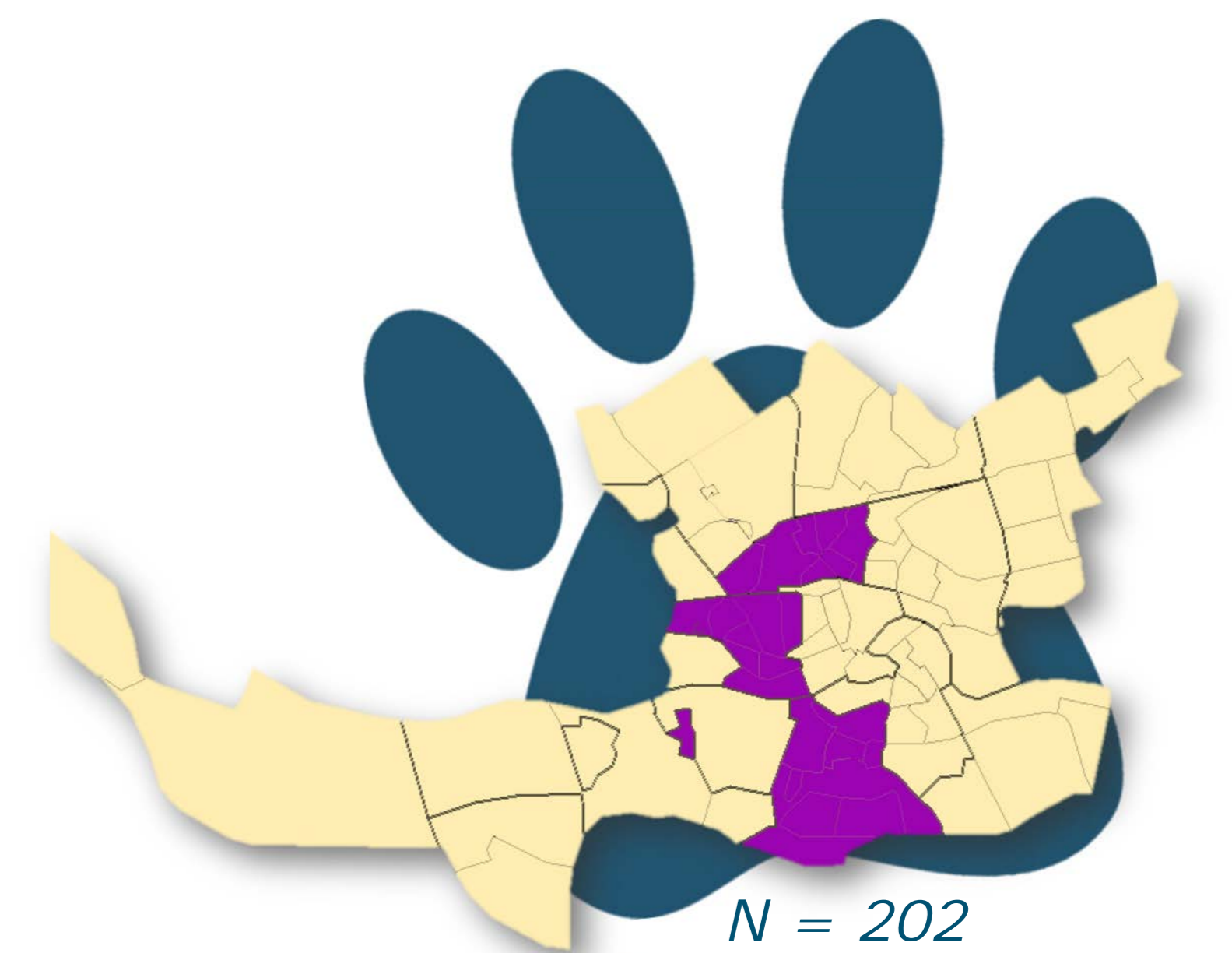
2: Course of lawsuits

Reaching a verdict takes a long time, during which dogs are kept in custody (avg: 101d; max: 777d; med: 56d)



3: Distribution of lawsuits in Dutch Police Districts

Rotterdam sees the most cases (32%, 2.3/1,000 inh), followed by The Hague, Maastricht, Amsterdam and Breda. Most cases within the Rotterdam PD occur in the Rotterdam municipality



4: Pit bulls in Rotterdam

Pit bull lawsuits are frequent (3.4/1,000 inh) and focused in 3 districts (> 50% of cases). More than half of people accused of owning a pit bull, have a prior criminal record

Discussion BSL did not achieve its goal of phasing out dogs of the pit bull terrier type

Even after fifteen years of BSL, still a considerable number of pit bull terrier type dogs were confiscated yearly and this number increased in the study period. The majority of dogs appeared to be pit bulls indeed.

BSL enforcement is faulty

Pit bulls can never be granted a FCI pedigree since they are not recognized by this institute as a breed. Therefore, establishing whether a dog is a pit bull is a subjective and lengthy affair, often leading to a 'tug of war' between the owner and the accuser, during which the dog is kept in custody. This can impair the dog's welfare.

Pit bull ownership is an issue seen in certain regions in the country

Confiscation – and possibly also ownership – of pit bulls is concentrated in certain areas in the country. Even within a municipality, certain neighbourhoods stand out.

Conclusion BSL is not a proper instrument to tackle the dog bite problem

Rather than banishing certain dog types, the issue of dog bites should be tackled with other instruments than BSL. With regards to pit bull terrier type dogs, it is recommended to focus on the dog owners and to intensify local regulation in neighbourhoods where the issue is prominent.

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* Cornelissen, J.M.R., Hopster, H. "Dog bites in The Netherlands: A study of victims, injuries, circumstances and aggressors to support evaluation of breed specific legislation," The Veterinary Journal (2009), doi: 10.1016/j.tvjl.2009.10.001.

