

DBRG Response to the Welsh Government Consultation: Revision of the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs

January 2018.

This consultation seeks views on the style, layout and content of the code and the information, advice and guidance it contains. It is important that you give as much information and evidence as possible to support your opinion. This will help us improve the accuracy and quality of the code. Comments are welcome on any part of the code.

This submission is provided by the UK Dog Breeding Reform Group the concern of which is particularly the prevention of inherited disease in dogs, and improvement in breeding and rearing practices to ensure the health and welfare of dogs. We welcome the consultation on the Code of Practice. We have particular concerns however about the current section concerning 'Breeding and Neutering' (draft COP paras, 5.11 to 5.13) which we feel is unduly limited and fails to adequately address key requirements of breeding practice to prevent unnecessary suffering in offspring, and ensure that the needs of breeding parents are adequately met (as required by Sections 4 and 9 of the AWA respectively). We respectfully propose some further text paragraphs for this part of the COP as indicated below in addition to the current draft COP paras 5.11, 5.12 and 5.13:

'Breeding and Neutering

(current para - retain) 5.11 The decision to breed from or neuter a dog is not a simple one. The health and welfare of the individual animal should always be considered. If a decision is taken to breed then the health and welfare of the puppies should also be considered. Before breeding, you should consider the health of the parents, the avoidance of inherited defects, how you will ensure appropriate socialisation and the likelihood of finding suitable homes for puppies. The decision to breed is a significant commitment and should not be undertaken lightly. Every effort should be made to avoid unplanned matings.

[Suggest INSERT before draft COP para 5.12 – new paras 5.12 to 5.17 below]

5.12 It is important that the potential for inherited diseases is prevented as far as possible. A great deal of suffering, often occurring throughout the lives of offspring, can arise from such diseases. The owner should seek advice about genetic conditions that may occur in the breed of dog they have, and wherever appropriate, ensure that the dog is assessed for the likelihood that they may pass on such conditions before choosing to breed from it. In most cases, where risk of passing on harmful conditions is identified then the dog should not be bred from.

5.13 A dog owner should also consider the physical conformation of the potential parents to be bred together. Certain conformations (for example, having a very flat face, a long back in relation to height, or extensive skin folds) can cause much suffering and lead to a

range of associated physical illnesses. Dogs with extreme conformations likely to lead to such suffering should not be bred from on advice from a veterinary practitioner. Dogs should not be bred from if their conformation necessitates surgical intervention, such as Caesarian section to enable birth of puppies, or to reduce suffering associated with physical difficulties arising from their conformation.

5.14 The potential for inherited disease is increased if closely-related dogs are bred together. This is known as 'inbreeding'. If they are, then the offspring have an increased chance of combining genes that can cause poor health. The more closely-related two dogs are the greater the risk. It is highly inadvisable to breed a dog together with another with which it has a close 'blood' relationship, including particularly relatives such as siblings, parent and offspring, grandparent, 'aunts', 'uncles', or cousins, though more distant relationships may create risks too. Advice should be sought ahead of mating about suitable partners to minimise the risk of such negative effects, for example from a veterinary surgeon, or reputable advisory bodies such as the UK Kennel Club.

5.15 Great care needs to be provided to a bitch throughout her pregnancy, as well as following whelping, and as the puppies develop and she begins to recover condition. If a bitch is in poor health or subject to undue stress then this is likely to affect the health and future development of the puppies. Attention should be given to ensuring that the bitch is well-fed, has ready access to a comfortable bed, and warm and draft-free environment. She should be monitored throughout the pregnancy and advice sought if her behaviour indicates, stress, discomfort or illness. A bitch should be enabled to have time away from pups once they begin to wean.

5.16 Bitches should not be bred from too frequently or before they are sufficiently mature to cope with the physical and emotional demands of this. In general, it is inappropriate to breed from a bitch below 12 months of age, but this may be higher for particular breeds, and advice should be sought. A bitch should never be bred from 'back-to-back' i.e. in successive periods of oestrus within one year. Bitches should only be used as a parent if they are in sound health. It may be prejudicial to the health of a bitch to breed from her on multiple occasions, and veterinary advice should be sought.

5.17 It is essential that breeding parents are chosen which have suitable temperaments. Temperament of the offspring is affected by that of the parent, and where there is indication of undue anxiety, fearfulness, or aggression then the dog should not be used as a parent. Bitches with poor temperaments may also not have the skills to nurture puppies well, which may prejudice their development.

(Remainder of section from Consultation draft):

(current draft COP para - retain but renumber) 5.12 You should consider having your dog neutered. Not only will this avoid the consequences of unplanned matings but there are other benefits associated with neutering. These include the avoidance of infections and cancers of the tissues that are removed, for example infections of the uterus and ovarian cancers in bitches and testicular cancers in male dogs. There may also be behavioural benefits. There are, however, also risks against which these benefits should be balanced. These include risks such as the risk of infection associated with the surgery itself and also increased risk of subsequent conditions such as obesity, some forms of urinary incontinence and some forms of cancer. The balance between potential benefits and harms will vary from one case to another and you should seek advice from your vet. Other sources of guidance are listed in Appendix 2.

(current draft COP para - retain but renumber) 5.13 As a dog owner you should make every effort to ensure that you make informed decisions about breeding from or neutering animals in your care. After all, you will be responsible not just for the decision itself but also for managing the consequences'.

We are also concerned about limited discussion of the socialisation requirements for puppies. We feel that the current text usefully covers habituation to unfamiliar situations (e.g. draft COP para 3.3), but does not adequately cover the need to ensure in the early period of puppy development (ie during the 'socialisation period' between 3 and 14 weeks) the need to progressively expose the puppy to contact and interaction with a range of people, to other friendly, vaccinated dogs where risk of contamination is low), and of other animals where possible too. We suggest a further COP para is introduced between draft para 3.3 and 3.4 as follows:

'3.3 (a) Puppies should be progressively exposed to interaction with a range of people as they develop. This should include regular, brief gentle handling in the first few weeks of life. Puppies should from a few weeks of age be exposed to the sound of human voices. As puppies develop and become more active leaving the whelping pen, they should be provided with opportunities to interact with a range of people, including children, in circumstances which minimise anxiety, and provide rewarding experiences. Careful exposure to suitable dogs other than the mother, is likely to be beneficial as puppies become more physically skilled and active. Suitable opportunities for interaction with people and other dogs should continue as puppies enter 'adolescence'.

Thank you..