



## **Animal Welfare Act (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018**

### **Review of Guidance notes for conditions for breeding dogs. (September 2019)**

#### **DBRG Comments and Recommendations**

DBRG aims to promote humane behaviour towards animals by providing and supporting initiatives to improve dog welfare related to:

- a) genetic and breed related health, breeding, rearing and selling practices: and
- b) to inform the general public about irresponsible dog breeding in order to make them aware of the potential impact on their dogs' health and welfare.

DBRG has the position that all dogs deserve the very best treatment, care and management when being used for breeding. All puppies should receive the very best care and preparation for life as a family pet or other appropriate role. The highest standards of care should be provided for all dogs and puppies in order to ensure the health and welfare of the dogs, as well as safeguarding the future experience of the owner. DBRG therefore recommends that the tiered risk-based system be replaced with a single system where the highest standards of care apply to all breeding establishments.

#### **Registration of all breeders**

We again recommend that all breeders, including those currently under the licensing threshold, are registered with the local authority and given a registration number which must accompany any advertisement for the sale of the puppies. This would ensure the identification of breeders and offer the general public a clearer guide to appropriate purchasing.

#### **Genetic Health of Breeding Dogs**

DBRG believes that any activity that compromises the health and welfare of dogs is a major concern. DBRG agrees with the BVA that breeding decisions should be taken with the aim of conferring healthy or healthier conformational traits, being mindful of the potential health and welfare impact of selection for specific or desirable structural features. Little

importance is given in the current Guidance to the genetic health of the sire and dam used for breeding despite it being a major welfare concern. The closed gene pools of pedigree and purebred dogs give rise to an unacceptable prevalence of genetic diseases. Many of these diseases may be avoidable if health screening/testing is carried out before selecting dogs for breeding purposes. Use of the BVA/KC Canine Health Schemes and DNA testing should be considered standard procedure. See also the DBRG Position Paper: Health Testing <http://www.dbrg.uk/uploads/5/5/5/6/55561953/policypositionhealthtesting10pdf>

Dogs used for breeding should also not be closely related in order to prevent issues associated to inbreeding. Coefficient of Inbreeding (COI) is the probability that the two genes present at a locus in that individual (in a litter of puppies) are identical by descent (IBD). That is, they are both identical copies of a single ancestral allele (a variant of a particular gene) which may have been inherited from both the mother and father. Since the COI describes the probability of IBD at each gene, it is a useful indicator of risk. The higher the COI, the greater chance that alleles at any gene locus are IBD and also that any mutant alleles are IBD. Inbreeding is therefore an important influence on the likelihood that diseases associated with deleterious genes is expressed. See also DBRG Position Paper: Inbreeding: <http://dbrg.uk/uploads/5/5/5/6/55561953/policypositioninbreeding14.pdf>. If breeding is to be carried out within a small breed group, there is further advice available regarding COI on the Kennel Club website.

### **Exaggerated conformation**

Furthermore, no dog which has an unnatural or exaggerated body shape (conformation) should be used for breeding. Breeding to moderate and non-exaggerated conformation is highly important to maintain health and function (The Kennel Club, 2018), and therefore extreme physical characteristics (such as skin folds, flat faces, round and bulging eyes, giant size, tiny size, sloping backs, overlong backs, too much hair, too little hair, absence of tail, skulls too small to contain the brain) must be avoided.

Extreme conformation can negatively affect the health and welfare of dogs. Each of the most common 50 dogs breeds is reported with at least one aspect of its conformation predisposing it to a disorder; and 84 disorders have been directly or indirectly associated with conformation (Asher et al., 2009)

Brachycephalic dogs are becoming increasingly popular in the UK. As a consequence of selective breeding for extreme appearance, a significant proportion of brachycephalic dogs suffer from a range of associated health problems. These include anatomical defects of the upper airway resulting in breathing difficulties (eg Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS), sleep apnoea and regurgitation (O'Neill et al, 2015, Packer et al, 2015b). They are also predisposed to eye disease (O'Neill et al, 2017a, Packer et al 2015a) skin disease as result of excessive skin folds, and are at risk of dystocia (difficult birth) due to mismatch between the size of the puppies' heads and the mothers' birth canal (BVA, 2018, O'Neill et al, 2017b).

Selection for the 'long and low' morphology of dog breeds, eg, Dachshund and Basset Hound, has resulted in a disproportionate dwarfism which predisposes these dogs to

intervertebral disc extrusion (IVDE). IVDE can result in spinal compression and injury which can severely compromise quality of life through pain and sensory and motor function abnormalities (BVA, 2018, Packer et al, 2016, Packer et al, 2013).

Other health issues that arise as a result of extreme conformation include skin and ear conditions, which are two of the most common disorders diagnosed by veterinarians in practice. (O'Neill et al, 2014). Dogs with excessive amounts of skin or excessive skin folds often develop inflammation, irritation and infection in the skin folds. Dogs with excessively long ears and large amounts of hair in and around them may be prone to ear infection, inflammation and itchiness (The Kennel Club, 2018).

By perpetuating such conformation features such dogs are not allowed to live a normal life and may need veterinary treatment. There are also potentially distressing consequences for owners. Dogs with such features often have high medical and surgical bills. These animals may require more complicated care than other dog breeds and also have to avoid general pet experiences, such as activities in warm weather, excitement and physical activities. The poor health and welfare, or early death of a pet results in significant emotional trauma for the owner (FECAVA, 2018).

For further information and detail, see The DBRG Position Paper on Extreme Conformation: <http://www.dbrg.uk/position-papers.html>

### **Protection from pain, injury, suffering and disease.**

The higher standards must apply to all dogs used for breeding. Twelve months is too young for a bitch to give birth or for a sire to be used. This relates directly to health testing; the procedure for hip and elbow testing should not be carried out on a dog younger than 12 months. Until this testing is carried out it will be unknown whether or not a dog is suitable for breeding. This further supports the need to wait until the dog is at least two years old before being used for breeding.

Six litters of puppies is too many for any female dog. Four litters should be the maximum for all bitches. (Ref the limit for Kennel Club registered litters is 4)

The regulations state – **No dog may be kept for breeding if it can reasonably be expected , on the basis of its genotype, phenotype or state of health that breeding from it could have detrimental effect on its health or welfare or the health or welfare of its offspring.** The words here state that 'no dog' should be kept for breeding in these circumstances. Therefore the higher standard should apply to all dogs used for breeding.

A Puppy Contract must accompany all sales. The contract should be a standard contract so that members of the public are familiar with it and there is a standard approach to the contract. It should be the AWF/RSPCA Puppy Contract at <https://puppycontract.org.uk> rather than one created by individual breeders or organisations, in order to ensure consistency and clarity for the public and breeders.

## Enforcement

DBRG considers it essential that local authority inspectors of breeding establishments should be fully trained to understand the health, welfare and socialisation needs of dogs in breeding establishments. They should have some knowledge of inherited health problems and a clear understanding of how to access expertise in these areas if required. This will ensure that concerns in this area are identified and addressed in a timely and effective manner, reducing or preventing long-term health and welfare implications.

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