

Position Statement on Inherited Health and Welfare Issues in Dogs

January 2023

Introduction

DBRG was established in 2012 to campaign for the reform of Dog Breeding in the UK, in order to protect dogs from the harms caused by irresponsible breeding practices. These include small gene pools in many breeds and the increased occurrence of inherited diseases; extreme conformations in some breeds which can prevent dogs from exhibiting natural behaviours, and can cause other associated harms; and poor husbandry practices. As a charity we provide a benefit to the general (puppy buying) public by making information available for informed puppy buying. Specifically, we promote the [AWF Puppy Contract](#), the [Code of Practice for Dog Breeding](#), the [BVA/KC Health Schemes](#), and [Guidance on Dog Conformation](#). In addition, we provide simple, graphic [Breed Posters](#) to inform puppy purchasers about the health issues of dog breeds (and some popular crossbreeds). These breed posters include information on key health screening and certification. We are also working to produce a Local Authority Training Module to assist local authority animal welfare inspectors when they are scrutinising licensed dog breeding premises. This will include breed-specific health and welfare information.

DBRG members agree that self-regulation by stakeholders in the dog breeding community does not adequately protect dog health and welfare. This suggests that improved and properly enforced legislation is required to protect dogs.

Regulatory Context

Animal Welfare Act 2006: Protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease, and Schedule 6 of the **Regulations for Dog Breeding 2018**, *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 a detrimental effect on its health or welfare or that of its offspring*; **Animal Sentience Act 2022:** recognises that animals have the ability to experience feelings, including pain, joy and fear, and that their emotions and welfare deserve consideration and protection. **Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015:** provides

for the compulsory microchipping of dogs and the recording of each dog's identity and its keeper's contact details on a database.

Protection for all dogs bred in the UK

The DBRG believes that all dogs deserve the maximum protection under the law: the female and male dogs used for breeding and their offspring whether Kennel Club registered pedigree dogs; purebred but not Kennel Club registered; mixed breed dogs; commercially bred dogs.

Cultural Change and Education

A cultural change is needed through education, leading to an understanding and acceptance that breeding dogs carries an ethical responsibility and that dogs should be bred with compassion. The owning and caring for a dog's health and welfare needs is also a huge responsibility and should not be taken lightly. To this end DBRG members advocate that the school curriculum should include understanding and caring for a dog as well as some understanding that poor breeding practices can result in inherited harms. This can be done at all levels from Junior to Secondary school. In the latter, there is scope within the Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum and within the Science (Biology) curriculum.

A change of approach and language is also needed in the political, economic and cultural sphere so that dogs are no longer regarded as commodities and that dog breeding should not be related to market demand. It should be agreed by all stakeholders that every dog bred and every dog used for breeding deserves equal protection under the law.

Kennel Club Registered Pedigree Dogs

Kennel Club registered dogs account for 30-40% of dogs bred in the UK. The KC is generally regarded as being at the top of the dog breeding pyramid and is therefore positioned to play a leading role in improving the health and welfare of dogs. It asserts that it is 'devoted to dog health and welfare' and its objective is to 'ensure that dogs live healthy, happy lives.' Supporting this claim, the KC Charitable Trust has donated a substantial amount of funding towards research into breed-related diseases in recent years.

However, Kennel Club registration itself does not necessarily equate to good health and welfare and there is a tension between the KC obtaining most of its money from registration fees and related services and its stated intention of improving the health and wellbeing of dogs.

DBRG would like to see more leadership on the part of the Kennel Club's General Committee in prioritising the health and welfare of dogs so that they are fit for an active life as family pets. Less emphasis on lineage and more emphasis on health and welfare and the suitability of dogs as pets, would help to bring about a cultural shift within the Kennel Club.

Measures should include more encouragement and pressure on breed clubs and their members to use the available BVA/KC Health Schemes or DNA testing of dogs selected for breeding. Also, on efforts by breed clubs to increase genetic diversity. These could include restrictions on the use of 'popular sires'; the reduction of the breed average Coefficient of

Inbreeding (COI) and increase of the breed Effective Population Size (EPS). Outcrossing to different or related breed(s) should be regarded as normal practice rather than the exception when the burden of genetic disease is too great.

The Kennel Club's Assured Breeders Scheme (ABS) is promoted as the answer to improved dog health. However, KC Assured Breeders remain a very small minority of breeders of the total number who register their puppies with the KC.

Recommendations for the Improved Regulations for Dog Breeding.

- A combined system of Licensing and Registration should be introduced. All dog breeders should be Local Authority Licensed (3 litters and above per year) or Registered (below 3 litters per year). This must include a 'one off' and an accidental litter. Local Authority Registration would involve the issuing of a LA number and contact details of the breeder. The cost of registration paid for by the breeder so that it is cost neutral for the local authority.
- In principle we support the retention of the Business Test for dog breeders and that it should not be limited to Licensed breeders
- The current Higher Standards within the LA Licensing system should apply to all dogs used for breeding and their offspring.
- All advertisements for the sale of puppies (or adoption with a 'rehoming' fee) must be accompanied by a LA Licence or Registration number
- The updating of Microchipping Regulations so that there are fewer databases and a single portal which makes the transfer of ownership of a dog a straightforward process. Dog welfare should not be compromised by business opportunities. We note that there is *one* database for the identification of horses in the UK.
- DBRG strongly recommends that the breeder's details are retained on the microchip database to enable traceability (even when ownership is transferred to a second or third owner) We believe this would encourage a breeder to breed more responsibly in terms of health and welfare, including inherited health.
- A reduction in the permitted number of litters in the lifetime of a breeding female to four litters (to match the English Regulations Higher Standard). This will enable a future life as a family pet.
- Fertility Clinics: DBRG would like to see the end of these. If artificial insemination is used to promote genetic diversity, this should be carried out at a veterinary practice which offers responsibly run fertility services. It should never be used on dog conformation types at risk of caesarean section births. It should never be used to enable the breeding of dogs with ever more 'extreme' body shapes
- Improved training for Local Authority Inspectors is needed. Local authority inspection of dog breeding premises should be carried out by Inspectors qualified in dog health and welfare, including conformation-related and genetic health and welfare. This must include the breed-related issues and available health screening and DNA tests. A guide to these issues is provided via the DBRG Breed Posters (the

50 most popular dog breeds and crossbreeds). A DBRG working group which includes a senior local authority animal welfare representative, is currently working on producing a more detailed Training Module for Inspectors. This will include appropriate socialisation and enrichment as well as inherited health and welfare on a breed-specific basis. The issue of genetic diversity also needs to be part of a LA Inspector's training.

- The breeding of any 'extreme' type should be discouraged. This must include extreme short limbs and long body, tiny dogs, giant dogs, overly hairy dogs, bald dogs, excessive wrinkles, rounded forward facing eyes, screw tails, etc. All of these can prevent a dog from exhibiting normal behaviour.
- A 'Fit to Breed' certificate should be issued for all dogs intended for breeding. The Fit to Breed certificate would include the minimum recommended BVA/KC Health Screening and breed-related DNA tests for all breeding dogs. It is essential that the sire is included. Conformation, genetic diversity and temperament must also be included in the 'Fit to Breed' certificate.
- Consideration should be given for a national dog breeding qualification. Ideally no-one should be allowed to breed dogs prior to obtaining this qualification
- The *Code of Practice for Dog Breeding* could be acknowledged by Defra and disseminated to LAs. In turn, it could be issued to breeders within the LA.
- The *Code of Practice for Dog Breeding* should be issued and promoted to breed clubs by the Kennel Club as a practical guide
- Similarly, the *Guidance on Dog Conformation* should be promoted and disseminated

DBRG is hopeful that the focus of APGAW in 2023 on the issue of the Inherited Health and Welfare Issues of Dogs can provide an effective momentum for change and that the UK can truly claim to have the highest welfare standards for dog health and welfare.