

Advisory Council on the Welfare Issues of Dog Breeding

COMMENT ON THE RSPCA PEDIGREE DOG BREEDING REPORT

The Advisory Council welcomes the RSPCA progress report, five years on from the first release of Pedigree Dogs Exposed.

It agrees that progress has been made in addressing the issues highlighted by the programme – and that more remains to be done.

The Council was itself created as a response to the programme in order that an independent panel of experts could provide advice on the welfare problems associated with the breeding of dogs. From the outset the Council has sought to collaborate with all those involved in the welfare issues of dog breeding, including the Kennel Club, as it feels strongly that this approach is the one that will most benefit dogs of all types.

Since its establishment in December 2010 the Council has delivered:

- an authoritative and evidence-based **Standard for Breeding Dogs**;
- Published (May 2012) assessments of and recommendations for addressing the **first eight welfare priorities**:
 - Ocular problems linked to head conformation;
 - Breathing difficulty linked to head conformation;
 - Syringomyelia and Chiari-like malformation;
 - Idiopathic Epilepsy;
 - Heart disease with a known or suspected inherited basis;
 - Breed-related and inherited skin conditions;
 - Limb defects (including hip dysplasia and elbow dysplasia);
 - Separation related behaviour: a serious but often hidden welfare issue for domestic dogs.
- Developed and piloted (October 2012) guidance for veterinary surgeons on **puppy health checks**, supported by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, the British Veterinary Association and the Veterinary Defence Society.
- Designed, delivered and launched (May 2012) a **web-based tool** supporting decisions on whether and how to buy a dog;
- Devised **research projects** on the assessment of prevalence data and the heritability of temperament

As to the priorities for further action outlined in the RSPCA report, the Council agrees with the overall thrust of the proposals and has the following detailed comments:

Breed standards and shows – the Council has already outlined a project addressing the key issues with regard to the descriptions of breeds, which builds on the conformation-associated welfare problems already identified as priorities. However, it believes that a multi-factorial approach is required to address tendencies

Advisory Council on the Welfare Issues of Dog Breeding

towards extremes of conformation including improved training and guidance for Show Judges in order both to *recognise* when there may be a health or welfare problem and to *provide feedback to breeders* on the problems they identify. The importance of a multifactorial approach involving, at least, veterinary surgeons, geneticists, animal welfare scientists and breeders in addressing the issues arising from exaggerated conformation is not contentious. The work of the Kennel Club's Dog Health Group and Sub-groups in addressing these issues must also be acknowledged. In addition, we note that breed related problems are not confined to the Kennel Club registered dog population, so that effective public and veterinary education remain vital.

The Council wholeheartedly supports the recommendation for more health checks at shows carried out by independent veterinary surgeons and governed by clear criteria. The Council recognises that a check on every dog shown may be impractical, but would recommend that it should be possible to inspect every Best of Breed, not just the high profile breeds, and to carry out spot checks.

Inbreeding – the Council supports all the RSPCA's priorities intended to address inbreeding, particularly the limit on the use of sires, the proposed revision of registration rules regarding matings between second degree relatives and the opening of stud books.

Although the Council recognises some limitations to its scope, we would encourage pedigree dog breeders to use the Kennel Club's Mate Select to address inbreeding issues in an informed and practical way.

However, it would also like to highlight problems which are beginning to arise with respect to designer cross breeds. First cross generations are likely to be healthier than either of the parents because of the combined genetic input from two breeds – in other words, puppies from a Labrador Retriever crossed with a Standard Poodle are less likely to be affected by genetically determined conditions than either the Labrador Retriever or the Standard Poodle. However, if breeders go on to cross, for instance, Labradoodles with Labradoodles, particularly if they use closely related crosses in an attempt to 'fix' particular characteristics, then they will re-create all the same inbreeding problems as have been experienced in pure breeds. This is an issue too little recognised and a pending problem that needs to be nipped in the bud now, before it is too late.

The Council supports the aim of reducing potential problems by not breeding from dogs that have had caesarean sections, but believes that the RSPCA's advice fails to recognise certain special circumstances that may result in caesarean section, such as illness in the mother, or malpresentation of the puppy.

With regard to the development of secondary legislation to control dog breeding, The Council has carried out a thorough review of the legislation relating to the sale and supply of dogs and advertising of dogs for sale and will be submitting its advice to governments before the end of the month.

Attached for information: The Council's Programme for 2013 and Forward look to 2014/15