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Dogs Australia response in relation to recent court decision in Norway

NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT BANS BREEDING OF BRITISH BULLDOGS AND CAVALIERS

The recent court decision in Norway to ban the breeding of British Bulldogs and Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, has resulted in debate and concern that a similar situation could occur in Australia. The Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI), of which Dogs Australia is an Associate Member, has stated that: *“The FCI community – which represents not less than 98 countries and thousands of breeders worldwide – truly hopes that the verdict would not provide a privileged position to the unregistered, backyard uncontrolled puppy farmers who perform their activity without making use of any of the available scientific methods aiming at improving the general health of dogs.”*

“To the contrary, registered breeders, with the assistance of responsible veterinarians, have been adopting quite an opposite approach for decades, getting very good results in terms of health.”

These sentiments reflect the approach taken by Dogs Australia/ANKC over many years. In response to media inquiries, we have formulated the following statements.

Do Dogs Australia currently hold any concerns over the breeding of 'flat-faced' dogs in Australia based on animal welfare?

We have concerns for all breeds of dogs, flat-faced or not. All breeds should be bred with due care to inherited diseases, especially where there are proven methods of disease testing whereby the incidence of severe disease can be minimised. This equally applies to flat-faced breeds and is based on animal welfare. Dogs Australia Breeders of British Bulldogs and Cavaliers use health testing regimes that ensure that breeding stock are suitable for breeding, as Australia has a large gene pool of both breeds, and other brachycephalic (flat-face) breeds.

What is Dogs Australia doing to improve the lives of dogs in Australia?

Dogs Australia breeders are bound by a Code of Ethics on frequency of breeding (basically one litter per year), maximum number of litters in the bitch's lifetime (6 with the average bitch having 3 litters or less) and health testing for recognised diseases.

If breeds and their breeders operate outside of Dogs Australia control, there are usually no basic health testing requirements and no limits on frequency of breeding or litter numbers. The challenge in Australia is to sideline these breeders who do not address health and welfare in their breeding programs; their only motivation to breed is for a quick profitable sale. The health and heritable disease status of their breeding stock is not central to their business plan, many crossbreed to obtain exotic colours, which can introduce significant health problems into a breed. All breeders of dogs where heritable diseases have been identified should be compelled by legislation to conform to a breeding code of ethics as Dogs Australia breeders are.

Would Dogs Australia back a call for banning breeds on welfare grounds?

For several reasons, Dogs Australia do not see any need for breeding bans. This would not stop backyard breeders or puppy farmers, and where breeds have a large population, there is sufficient genetic variety to gradually breed away from diseases and structural abnormalities. Each breed has within it a very wide range of structure, temperament, and health components. For the sake of a few severely affected individuals, why should the whole breed have to be banned. Our approach is to address the major problems, consistently remove any adversely affected individuals from breeding programs, and the breed can change over time to an overall healthier breed. With a large gene pool and access to DNA and other regimes to ensure the health of breeding stock, it has been proven that responsible breeders can reduce the incidence of heritable diseases.

Given the obvious 'line in the sand' approach taken by the Oslo District Court (which has the impact of significantly raising the profile of the welfare of certain breeds), in response to the concerns of Animal Protection Norway, where is the line for Dogs Australia on this issue?

The Norwegian response is a basic full stop. This should have been a considered response as mentioned previously, targeting specific diseases or construction issues, and giving breeders time (5-10 years minimum to improve breed averages, preferably

longer). Many breeders have spent lifetimes preserving these breeds and need to be allowed to gradually adapt as breeds take generations to change without causing further conditions to occur due to a sudden narrowing of the gene pool. Outcrossing is of limited value unless to correct a

fixed disease or an extremely limited gene pool such as numerically restricted breeds. Dogs Australia is confident that observing of the Breeding Codes of Ethics and using international diagnostic programs will ensure that people who purchase any breed, including brachycephalic breeds, from Dogs Australia breeders can be assured of a healthy, long-lived puppy.

Has enough been done in Australia – both about irresponsible and/or illegal breeders but also the actual welfare and health of breeds?

Dogs Australia has no control over rogue puppy farmers or backyard breeders. The problem in Australia is that state and territory legislation only targets responsible breeders who can be easily identified. The illegal breeders advertise on the Internet and are usually only contactable by mobile phone, which makes it virtually impossible for the regulators to find them; and they ignore government requirements to obtain a Breeders Identification Number because they know that they are untraceable, which means that there is no pressure on them to observe health and welfare issues regarding their breeding stock. We have well developed health testing schemes for hips, elbows, hearts, eyes, and DNA breed specific testing for a wide range of diseases. Some of these tests are national requirements for all litters bred (LRL's – litter registration limitations) where all parents must be health tested, as well as numerous additional health testing requirements within breed clubs.

Is the Respiratory Function Grading Scheme a thing in Australia? Or something similar? Is it of use?

Dogs Australia are licensed to the Kennel Club (UK) / Cambridge University Respiratory Function Grading Scheme. We have appointed Dr Arthur House, a Veterinarian Specialist in brachycephalic diseases to head the RFG Scheme in Australia; however, due to COVID restrictions in his home state, Victoria, the implementation has been delayed, but we expect to be underway shortly. There are pockets within several states where this testing is being done (unofficially at present). Dogs Australia would prefer the scheme to be official so the results are internationally acceptable. We feel this system is the best possible means of moving forwards in validating healthy breeding dogs within the brachycephalic breeds.