

## **THE KENNEL CLUB'S PLANS FOLLOWING THE BROADCAST OF PASSIONATE PRODUCTIONS PROGRAMME – PEDIGREE DOGS EXPOSED**

At its General Committee meeting on September 2, the Kennel Club agreed to take a number of actions following the broadcast of the recent BBC documentary looking at breed health.

The Kennel Club strongly rejects any implication in the programme that it is complacent, or that it has failed to take seriously, or act on the issues covered by the programme. This is fundamentally not the case. Undoubtedly the programme was made to an agenda, and therefore relied on the sensational to make its points, resulting in what we believe was an extremely biased piece of television, which not only ignored much of the excellent work already underway, but also offered no solutions of its own!

Indeed, by its lack of balance and criticism of those in the Kennel Club and the breed clubs who are working so hard to find practical ways to promote breed health, it potentially set the agenda back, rather than moving it forward. That said, we acknowledge that many of those watching are unaware of our work, and it is therefore incumbent on the Kennel Club to take positive action to refute such poor journalism. We believe that our best response therefore is a simple but clear examination of the facts, and effective communication of the robust measures we are putting in place.

### **VAST MAJORITY HEALTHY**

The Kennel Club acknowledges that some breeds do have problems and has been taking action for many years to deal with them. However, our extensive research underlines the fact that the vast majority of breeds and dogs are healthy.

Thankfully, few of us, or of the general pet owning public, will have seen any of the problems which were portrayed as commonplace on the TV programme. Neither the 160,000 visitors to Crufts this year, nor the many millions of other dog loving viewers who watch it on television, will have recognised the description "*disabled mutants in a freakish, garish beauty pageant*" from what they saw – which was beautiful, healthy animals interacting with proud and loving owners! This is the reality, and while it is of course legitimate to investigate dog health, we do not feel that it is legitimate to portray the findings of those investigations in such a one-sided way which completely ignores the efforts of all those most closely involved with dog health.

### **PROUD OF ACTIONS TAKEN**

To repeat, the KC is far from complacent; where health is concerned more can always be done – and it is being done. The Kennel Club is proud of the many actions which it and the many breeders and breed clubs have been taking for over 20 years to improve canine health and welfare, and just how far we have already come. For example:

- The development of the KC/BVA health screening programmes
- The funding and support to enable a vast number of DNA tests to be developed
- The many breed club health programmes
- The health initiatives in partnership with the veterinary profession
- The Kennel Club Accredited Breeder Scheme

- The introduction of working stock to widen gene pools in some breeds
- The KC/BSAVA canine health survey of 52,000 dogs
- The health inspired changes to breed standards
- The education programmes for judges and breeders
- The canine research projects funded by the Kennel Club Charitable Trust
- The recent facilitation of the Imperial College work quoted in the TV programme
- The introduction of the 'Fit for function: fit for life' campaign

And there are many more initiatives. The Kennel Club is a concerned and conscientious organisation which has as its main objective 'the general improvement of dogs'. As such it defends the commendable actions of responsible breeders, and is proud of the role it has played in both developing and promoting them.

### **Future plans:**

While the Kennel Club already had in place an ongoing detailed strategic plan to deal with all the key health issues, the recent Pedigree Dogs Exposed programme has catapulted this topic firmly into the public eye and has added urgency to our existing activity. Some of this activity has already been announced, but the Kennel Club would like to take this opportunity to outline generally what initiatives are currently under consideration.

## **REPUTATION OF DOG BREEDERS AND THE KENNEL CLUB:**

### **ACTIONS WITHIN THE WORLD OF PEDIGREE DOGS**

**The Kennel Club will make full use of the measures it has within its remit and authority to ensure that all breed clubs and councils encourage their members to undertake health screening appropriate to each breed and that individual breeders reach the highest possible standards of husbandry and welfare.**

- **The Kennel Club Breed Health and Welfare Strategy Group** (BHWSG) will continue to play a major role in this. It consists of a number of people as follows:

Dr Ruth Barbour, BA., MB ChB, FRCGP (Chairman)

Prof. Mike Herrtage, MA, BVSc, DVR, DVD, DSAM, DECVIM, DECVDI, MRCVS, Dean of Cambridge Veterinary School

Prof. Sheila Crispin, MA, VetMB, BSc, PhD, DVA, DVOpthal, DipECVO, FRCVS, Past President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

Frank Kane, Chairman Kennel Club Breed Standards Committee

Meg Purnell-Carpenter, Vice-Chairman Kennel Club Breed Standards Committee

Ronnie Irving, Kennel Club Chairman

Caroline Kisko, BSc, Kennel Club Secretary

KC Health Department

Dr Jeff Sampson, BSc DPhil, Genetics Advisor

Bill Lambert, Health & Information Manager

Diana Brookes-Ward, BSc, Health Co-ordinator

Those breed clubs and councils which have been consulting and making progress with the Kennel Club can expect to continue to do so – with renewed vigour and determination.

Some breed organisations, especially any which may have been unwilling to co-operate with Kennel Club demands benefitting the health of the breed, can expect the Kennel Club to be tougher on them and to take unilateral action to enforce its demands if necessary.

There are already plans underway for members of the Breed Health and Welfare Strategy Group, to deal with issues regarding the following breeds over the next few weeks and months: German Shepherd Dogs, Basset Hounds, Bloodhounds, Neapolitan Mastiffs, Dogues De Bordeaux, and a joint meeting of representatives of a number of brachycephalic breeds such as the Pug and the French Bulldog.

A special meeting will be held to deal with issues regarding the Pekingese Breed Standard. It will also look at the possibility of other measures, in the event of breeders or judges refusing to accede to Kennel Club requests.

- **Veterinary Passport**

We are also considering the introduction of a 'Veterinary Passport' before allowing certain breeds to compete at Kennel Club licensed dog shows. This would be designed specifically for particular breeds, confirming the status of a dog's health and conformation in relation to certain prescribed aspects before they could be shown.

- **Codes of Ethics**

To ensure consistency across all breeds, the Kennel Club is reviewing its own Code of Ethics, taking the Animal Welfare Act into consideration and adding such items as 'culling' as an unacceptable practice in relation to non breed standard traits. As stated some 20 years ago and that remains in the case

The Kennel Club considers culling to be unacceptable and in fact required the Dalmatian breed clubs to remove this requirement from the breed code of ethics some twenty years ago and had instructed the Rhodesian Ridgeback clubs to remove the requirement from their codes of ethics.

KC Registered Breed Clubs will, in future, be instructed that they must adopt the Kennel Club's Code of Ethics and that any additions or departures from these must be referred to - and be approved by - the Kennel Club. These will form part of Breed Club Annual Returns in future.

- **Kennel Club Challenge Certificates**

Challenge Certificates, the means of creating champions, are entirely within the gift of the Kennel Club and the allocation to each breed will be reviewed. The General Committee has agreed that the allocation to breeds should, in future, take much greater account of the willingness of those clubs and breeders and judges involved in each breed to deal positively with health and welfare issues.

- **Judges**

Reinforcing the many actions already taken to train and emphasise to judges the paramount importance of health and welfare issues, a conference of Group and Best in Show judges is to be held. This will ensure that all of these senior people are given the opportunity to lead the way in recognising the responsibilities they have, and to stress the actions which will be taken if judges fail to place health and welfare considerations sufficiently high when judging.

Consideration is also to be given to requiring breed clubs and councils to organise, every few years, conferences at which mainly specialist CC judges would be required to attend to review breed health and welfare and endeavour to avoid detrimental exaggerations.

Judges' ongoing performance will be kept under review to ensure that health remains an important priority for all when judging.

- **Line Breeding and Genetic Diversity**

The Kennel Club's Geneticist, Dr Jeff Sampson has been involved with Imperial College on this issue for some three years, and is to continue the work started with them. This work will examine the available research findings, specifically considering the evidence relating to close matings and frequently used sires. To speed the process, Dr Sampson will enlist the help of a quantitative geneticist to develop this work further.

## **KENNEL CLUB ACCREDITED BREEDER SCHEME – THE IMPORTANCE OF ITS SUCCESS**

Individual breeders lie at the heart of the continuing improvement of the health of our pedigree dogs. Therefore the Kennel Club's major health emphasis for the future of pedigree dogs in this country is going to be through the further development of the Kennel Club Accredited Breeder Scheme.

Currently the scheme, which is now just over four years old, is being reviewed and the Kennel Club will be outlining its proposals shortly.

To be effective, the scheme must be supported by all responsible dog breeders if it is to be taken seriously by government and by the puppy buying public. Some breeders have had doubts about joining and indicating their willingness to support this voluntary scheme.

While the ABS is not the complete answer, it does give breeders a way of demonstrating their commitment to dog health and welfare. If serious breeders had doubts about joining before the broadcast of the recent TV programme then it is hoped that the importance of having such a scheme was underlined, and the necessity of everyone working together is vital. The KC is also totally committed to promoting the scheme to the wider public and ensuring its success.

## **SELF REGULATION OR LEGISLATION?**

Breeders should recognise that the alternative to being guided by the Kennel Club is to be legislated by government or a government supported organisation. If it is shown that the dog world is unable or unwilling to clean up its own act – then recent events should indicate the way in which such external legislation could go. In Pedigree Dogs Exposed, the RSPCA's Chief Vet made the following statements:

*“The RSPCA is extremely concerned about the very high levels of disability, deformity and disease in pedigree dogs.”*

*“The cause is very simple: it is competitive dog showing. That is what has caused the problem.”*

*“This is a no-brainer. Of course we have to change. We have to encourage those involved in the industry to do a complete top to bottom review of both Breed Standards and the rules and regulations of dog showing, to move it away from its obsession with beauty through to quality of life. But unless we start now, the pedigree dog hasn't got a chance.”*

**These are the views of the organisation which wants to take a leading role in controlling dog breeding in this country – and it is what we risk if initiatives such as the Accredited Breeder Scheme do not succeed. The Kennel Club needs to prove these views wrong.**

## **GENERAL PUBLIC AND OTHER EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS – COMMUNICATIONS PLANS**

### **Media**

- **Relationship with the BBC.** It is inevitable that this programme has put strains on the relationship between the KC and the BBC. Legal constraints prevent us at this stage from going into details on how that will move forward. Suffice it to say that the Kennel Club believes that the recent programme ‘Pedigree Dogs Exposed’:
  - was biased and selective
  - did not correctly or fairly represent the work, efforts and investment in health by breeders and the Kennel Club
  - was through its sensationalist presentation, potentially damaging to the work being done to improve health, and directly damaging to the reputation of pedigree dogs, breeders and the Kennel Club.

However, again our best response here is a positive one. The Kennel Club will be in discussions with the BBC about all future programming plans, and wishes it to highlight the health and welfare work that is and has been going on. The world of pedigree dogs deserves an opportunity to present a balanced perspective on the subject and be allowed to repair some of the damage which has been done to its reputation.

- **Future broadcast coverage.** Despite our disappointment with this particular programme, the Kennel Club has no wish to withdraw from open dialogue with programme makers and, will assess all opportunities as they occur with a view to ensuring positive TV coverage of responsible dog breeders, owners and pedigree dogs in general. To this end, a number of other detailed ideas are being explored. Local radio stations continue to offer us a good route to reach the pet owning public and to spread our messages regarding the advantages of pedigree dog ownership.
- **Develop [www.doggenetichealth.org](http://www.doggenetichealth.org) website and stress throughout the existing **Fit for Function: Fit for Life** campaign.** Further developments on this campaign will be unveiled in due course.

- **Information regarding available health tests per breed** will be tailored for and included with registration documents and as part of the Kennel Club Puppy Sales Register information pack – building on the existing generic information.
- **Health booklet.** A booklet will be developed as a single source to highlight all the work which has been undertaken and which is being undertaken and planned, to improve the health of pedigree dogs - including research projects currently in hand, details of available health surveys, screening schemes, DNA schemes and the health work funded by the Kennel Club Charitable Trust. This will enable us to ensure that all who are interested can easily see the amount of work being undertaken both by the KC and by breed clubs.

### **RSPCA**

A meeting has already been held between the Kennel Club and senior representatives of the RSPCA and further meetings will follow. The true position of dog breeders and all of the work currently taking place is being fully communicated to the RSPCA and the Kennel Club is endeavouring to establish the official position of the RSPCA as an organisation, and its views on pedigree dogs and dog shows. The Kennel Club is taking a robust and proactive line in these discussions, pointing out that in fact both organisations have the same agenda – better dog health.

### **The Veterinary Profession**

The Kennel Club will continue to build on existing relationships and projects with the veterinary profession. These already include close contact and meetings with the Office Bearers of the relevant Veterinary bodies, Senior Academics of the Veterinary Schools, presence of Kennel Club documentation in veterinary practices, visits of veterinary students to Crufts and a whole range of other activities.

Full information on all the work undertaken by the Kennel Club and breed clubs will also be made freely available to veterinary professionals to ensure that they are aware of all that is being undertaken.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Kennel Club is, and always has been, very well aware of the problems faced by some pedigree dog breeds. It has, along with many responsible dog breeders, been tackling these constructively for many years. It has never made a secret of any of these problems and it is well aware of its responsibilities. The Kennel Club can demonstrate the huge number of ways in which it is discharging these responsibilities.

The Kennel Club will continue to research new ways of improving the health of dogs but it is proud of its record in this area and will continue in the future to carry out and develop its current health and welfare policies. All of these are designed to achieve its overall objective – “The general improvement of dogs”.