



Brachycephalic health: changes to breed standards essential

The DBRG welcomes the promptness with which the Kennel Club reacted to the petition from vets calling for urgent action to tackle issues surrounding brachycephalic breeds in calling a meeting of interested parties earlier this month. However, it believes meaningful improvements to the quality of dogs' lives can only be achieved by serious measures including changing breed standards to encourage healthier body shapes.

Chris Laurence MBE, DBRG Trustee, says: "Unless these alter, I fear nothing will change. The standards need to be set out stating clearly what dogs should look like."

Dr Rowena Packer from the Royal Veterinary College and also a **DBRG member**, whose main area of research interest is brachycephalic health, states: "There is clear evidence that **muzzle length and the risk of Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS) are intricately linked**. This link is so strong that to substantially reduce the risk of BOAS in affected breeds, conformational changes are needed; namely longer muzzles. This change could also reduce **the risk of ophthalmic, dental and skin problems associated with short muzzles**."

Stenotic nares (narrowed nostrils) are an abnormality seen in brachycephalic dogs and are another issue of serious concern. "Wide open nostrils are key to allowing dogs to breathe freely and control their body temperature effectively," says Dr Packer. "Narrowed nostrils lead to substantial restrictions in airflow, resulting in breathing difficulties that are distressing and limit a dog's physical exercise, with even gentle exercise being a challenge. It is vital breeders select for wide open nostrils in all breeds of dog."

In addition to muzzle length, DBRG also has **concerns about other aspects of brachycephalic breed standards**, including **screw tails** desired in some breeds. "This shape is caused by deformation of the vertebrae, bones essential to protect the spine," explains Dr Rowena Packer. "Selection for screw tails can result in malformed vertebrae, which can lead to back pain and weakness and, in severe cases, paralysis. Yet the current breed standard for Pugs demands the tail should be 'High set, tightly curled over hip. Double curl highly desirable'.

"We strongly suggest that **breed standards are revised with healthy conformational limits** incorporated into them. These are thresholds to health that we shouldn't breed dogs beyond, and could include evidence-based minimum muzzle lengths to protect against BOAS," says Dr Packer.

The DBRG urges the Kennel Club to seriously consider these changes to ensure the written breed standard of the breeds concerned are blueprints for sound, healthy dogs. It also believes **health tests should be incorporated into the show-ring**. These could include exercise tolerance tests where dogs' ability to breathe normally could be assessed objectively to detect BOAS and ensure only healthy dogs win prizes and are allowed to be bred from more broadly.

Although they may not have control over all the dogs in the UK, the DBRG would like to see the KC and breed clubs set an example by putting health at the heart of all breeding decisions and showing strong leadership on improving brachycephalic health.

Carol Fowler, DBRG Founder, says: “Where the KC and breed clubs lead, others follow. This is a brilliant opportunity to create breed standards for moderate and, most of all, healthy dogs.”

THE DBRG’S BRACHYCEPHALIC ACTION PLAN

- Changes to KC breed standards including introduction of a minimum muzzle length and removal of detrimental features such as “screw tails” and “nasal folds”
- Selection against stenotic nares should be strongly encouraged, including disqualification of dogs from the show ring exhibiting this feature
- Serious consideration should be given to outcrossing to longer-nosed breeds to bring about faster change, particularly in breeds with little diversity in skull shape
- A requirement for judges to have training from veterinary experts in the effects of BOAS
- More thorough vet checks at dog shows including functional tests
- Development of compulsory functional respiratory tests before using brachycephalic dogs in breeding
- A concerted and coordinated effort from all organisations involved with welfare to dissuade people from choosing excessively flat-faced dogs and educate the public regarding the consequences of extreme brachycephalic conformation
- A drive to dissuade companies not to use such dogs in advertising. The DBRG fully supports the Campaign for the Responsible Use of Flat-Faced Animals (CRUFFA) in its work in this area

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Note to editors

DBRG is an organisation dedicated to improving the health and welfare of dogs through responsible breeding. It was founded in 2013 and became a Charitable Trust in 2015. Members of the DBRG include veterinary specialists, dog welfare and law experts, breeders and dog owners.

For more information about the DBRG please visit www.dogbreedingreformgroup.uk or contact Carol Fowler carol@cavaliercampaign.com or call 01453 843944