



DBRG welcomes BVA's stance on breed standard reform and outcrossing

The DBRG welcomes the strong statement made by Sean Wensley, president of the BVA, calling for modifications of breed standards for some brachycephalic breeds and the serious consideration of outcrossing.

Dr Rowena Packer from the Royal Veterinary College and a **DBRG member**, whose research heavily focuses on brachycephalic health, states: "The DBRG has said before that we wish to see breed standards revised in line with existing evidence, with healthy conformational limits incorporated into them. These are thresholds to health that we shouldn't breed dogs beyond, and are part of the **DBRG's Brachycephaly Action Plan** [see below]."

Sean Wensley was commenting on a recently published paper by Pederson, et al in *Canine Genetics and Epidemiology* that highlighted the genetic health and welfare problems of the English Bulldog. The research concludes that Bulldogs have very low genetic diversity resulting from a small founder population.

Based on the results of this study, Dr Packer comments: "Our previous research findings have recommended that breeders move away from the extreme body shape currently seen in many Bulldogs and other short-muzzled breeds, and instead select for more moderate dogs within their own breed to avoid associated breathing, skin, eye, reproductive and dental problems."

Dr Packer continues: "This recommendation was with the proviso that there was sufficient genetic diversity within the breed that these new selective measures would not lead to more problems. This study has demonstrated that the required genetic diversity may unfortunately not be present in Bulldogs, and thus to obtain healthier body shapes we should strongly consider outcrossing with another, less extreme breed."

"The media storm that has surrounded bulldogs over the last few days will have done much to make the public more aware of the health problems that can result from dogs being bred to look a certain way," says **Carol Fowler, DBRG founder**. "Bulldogs are undoubtedly much loved by the majority of their human owners. However, many enamoured owners fail to appreciate the poor quality of life these dogs endure and may even find their 'snuffling' part of the Bulldog charm. If outcrossing is the only way to produce dogs with less extreme features, this must be considered."

Carol Fowler continues: "The 'brachy petition' championed by Pete Wedderburn and this statement from the BVA have illustrated that the veterinary profession is a powerful force for change when it makes a stand. Bulldogs are not the only breed suffering as a result of inbreeding and selection on the basis of outward aesthetics rather than health and we need the veterinary profession to show the same boldness in raising its voice about other breeds in crisis."

"Sadly, there are so many examples of physical features being exaggerated to the detriment of dogs' health, including the breeding of so-called 'tea cup' varieties of breeds such as Chihuahuas. Size reduction can be linked to bone fragility and open fontanelles," she says. "At the other end of the spectrum, giant breeds are susceptible to rapid growth-related issues such as the crippling orthopaedic condition osteochondrosis."

Outcrossing not only has the potential to improve conformation-related disorders but has the potential to reduce the incidence of disease in a variety of pedigree breeds, believes Carol Fowler: “Although their problems are not as outwardly obvious as some, the incidence of heart disease and painful neurological issues in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels means this breed is in just as much trouble.

“The Kennel Club’s ‘solution’ for the breed for this breed is to provide Estimated Breeding Values yet it seems reluctant to put pressure on breeders to health test in order to provide the necessary data. Even if this happens in future, generations of Cavaliers will continue to be affected by these conditions, so again **outcrossing projects should be considered to bring about more rapid changes to health.**”

THE DBRG’S BRACHYCEPHALY 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 and genetic diversity
- 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