



MAKE CRUFTS AN ARENA FOR POSITIVE CHANGES AND HEALTHIER BODY SHAPES

The Dog Breeding Reform Group (DBRG) believes that the dog showing world, and in particular high-profile events such as Crufts, can be a lever for positive change towards more moderate, healthier body shapes.

Dr Rowena Packer from the Royal Veterinary College and **DBRG member**, says: “The Bateson Inquiry in 2010 highlighted the sway and power of dog shows and judges. Although only a small percentage of dogs in this country may ever see the show ring, the influence of this small population is enormous. Winning dogs often produce multiple litters, influence public perception of what a breed ‘should’ look like and inspire others to breed for a similar look or shape.”

Dr Packer’s key area of research interest is brachycephalic health. Such flat-faced breeds, which include English Bulldogs, French Bulldogs and Pugs, have surged in popularity in recent years and many, including the DBRG, believe this fashion for dogs with exaggerated features is a major health and welfare concern.

“There is clear evidence that **muzzle length and the risk of Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS) are intricately linked,**” says Dr Packer. “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.**”

One of the visual markers of brachycephalic health that can be easily observed and judged in the show-ring is nostril shape. **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. “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,” says Dr Packer.

“A shift in the show-ring towards noticeably moderate brachycephalic dogs, with longer muzzles, wider nostrils, less pronounced wrinkles and leaner bodies would convey a powerful message to the general dog breeding community. It would clearly demonstrate that breeding for health takes precedence over appearance in these breeds. The show-ring has the chance to lead by example and be the positive influence needed in the challenge to improve brachycephalic health” says Dr Packer.

The Kennel Club responded to the concerns of the public and the veterinary profession by sending a representative to a Brachycephalic Health Working Group. DBRG hopes that a greater awareness of the need for healthier, less extreme body shapes will be reflected in dogs exhibited, and most importantly selected for prizes, at this year’s Crufts. DBRG also welcomes the recently announced BOAS online learning resource on the Kennel Club Academy.

Carol Fowler, DBRG Founder, says: “Where the KC and breed clubs lead, others follow. This is a brilliant opportunity to highlight and reward 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

March 2017 - Ends

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