

To Executive Council

Re: Bulldog Breed Standard

Recommendation:

The Canine Health & Welfare Committee (CHWC) recommend that the recent decision to retain the current Dogs NZ Bulldog Breed Standard be reviewed.

The CHWC heard summaries of submissions made against adopting the current FCI standard at their meeting March 8th, 2019. The CHWC considered the individual members, and Clubs submissions and found that there was a consistent appeal to retain the country of origin UK standard over the FCI standard.

The CHWC understand and appreciate requests to retain the country of origin Breed Standard (UK) and therefore make the recommendation to adopt the current UK standard.

Rationale:

Brachycephalic breeds are under significant and growing pressure from government, welfare and veterinary groups. There is a world-wide trend toward awareness and Regulation of so called 'excessive breed-related traits' and this is seen through the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) and the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations (FECAVA) schemes.

As one extreme example, The Netherlands government is introducing compulsory fitness testing for brachycephalic breeds prior to them being allowed to be used for breeding. This compulsory test involves exercise then recovery speed, heart rate and breathing characteristics. The test also involves measurements, one being a specified allowable craniofacial ratio where the muzzle length must be at least 1/3rd of the cranial length.

This, as stated by Netherlands government officials, is a response to a failure of breeders to join voluntary health schemes to make improvements. This Regulation presents a considerable risk of breed extinction in that country.

Current NZ Breed Standard v International Breed Standards:

In 2017 the CHWC presented a review of the current Dogs NZ Bulldog Breed Standard to the Brachycephalic Working Group, EC and Breed Standards Committee.

This involved a direct comparison with the current UK and FCI standards. The current UK and FCI standards are identical in wording but differ slightly in layout.

The current UK and FCI standards were adopted by those organisations in November 2010, following an extensive review of all UK breed standards. The 'new' standard removes suggestions of extreme conformation features and state features that are directly related to animal welfare detriment but is otherwise consistent with the pre-2010 standard in other wordings.

Just one example in the 2010 UK Standard "Pinched nostrils and heavy over nose roll are unacceptable and should be heavily penalised". No such statement is made in the current Dogs NZ standard.

Dr Crosse, Senior Small Animal Surgeon at Massey University Veterinary Teaching Hospital said that key BOAS researchers at Cambridge University told her they had seen vast improvements in health

of bulldogs since change of the UK standard and implementation of breeding guidelines based on BOAS scoring. So much so that they were no longer as concerned about the breed. This data will be made available in science journal-form soon.

Key Health Issues Identified in Current NZ Standards:

The current Dogs NZ standard describes desirable features that have been shown to be directly related to animal welfare detriment.

Liu et al 2017 (demonstrated in fig. 1) showed that pinched nostrils, skull index and neck girth ratio are significantly and reliably associated with Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS) status in Bulldogs.

These features are all encouraged as desirable breed attributes in the current Dogs NZ standard with the following taken directly from it:

- The head strikingly massive and large in proportion to the dogs' size.
- Face extremely short.
- Muzzle very broad, blunt and inclined upwards.
- Skull should be very large, the larger the better and in circumference should measure (round in front of the ears) at least the height of the dog at the shoulders.
- Viewed at the side, the head should appear very high, and very short from its back to the point of the nose.
- The face, measured from the front of the cheek-bone to the nose, should be as short as possible.
- The nose... should be deeply set back almost between the eyes.
- The lower jaw should project considerably in front of the upper and turn up.
- (The neck) Should be moderate in length (rather short than long), very thick, deep and strong. It should be well arched at the back, with much loose, thick and wrinkled skin about the throat.

BOAS is perhaps the most obvious conformation-related health issue but other welfare issues including skin fold pyoderma, shallow orbits with protruding globes, hemivertebrae, dystocia and dental malocclusion can all be related directly back to the current Dogs NZ standard 'desired' features.

The UK Kennel Club said in 2009, 'all breed standards were reviewed to ensure that no standard demands any feature which could prevent a dog from breathing, walking and seeing freely. Above all, dogs of all breeds should be able to live healthy, comfortable lives – health and soundness must come first'.

Our Responsibility for Pedigree Dog Welfare:

It is important as we move within an increasingly animal welfare focused society that we make decisions based on scientific evidence, and in time with the rest of the world. Dogs NZ is responsible for the health and welfare of its Pedigree dogs.

It is also responsible for maintaining proactive and positive regulatory stakeholder relationships for the overall benefit of its membership.

The retention of an outdated breed standard which specifically requires features scientifically proven to cause animal welfare compromise opens the organisation to not only reputational and relationship risks but also the harm and potential demise of those breeds.

Dogs NZ is in a strong position to send a message to not only its membership, but also external stakeholders, that we take the health and welfare of our dogs seriously.

Canine Health & Welfare Committee.

Liu N-C, Troconis EL, Kalmar L, Price DJ, Wright HE, Adams VJ, et al. (2017) *Conformational risk factors of brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome (BOAS) in pugs, French bulldogs, and bulldogs*. PLoS ONE 12(8): e0181928. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0181928>

Figure 1

