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**UK Brachycephalic Working Group Consensus Statement
Applying a Welfare Criterion as a Decision-making Priority in Discussions relating to
Brachycephalism in Dogs**

September 3, 2021

“Maximising good health, welfare and temperament overrides all other considerations for dogs”

Summary

The Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) maintains that the most fundamental criterion underpinning any decisions in relation to dogs is that *‘Maximising good health, welfare and temperament overrides all other considerations for dogs’*.

The BWG agree to place this concept at the hub of all BWG decision-making because we believe that prioritizing the needs of the dog will promote the best possible outcomes for brachycephalic dogs.

The BWG urges all other stakeholders and anyone with an interest in dogs to adopt this BWG focus that prioritises the needs of the dog for their decision-making.

Background

The Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) understands that decision-making in relation to dogs with brachycephalism is inherently complex, with substantial human interests being consciously or unconsciously included within and influencing every final decision.

In addition to any concerns for dog welfare itself, the breadth of human factors that may be considered consciously or unconsciously in each decision-making episode include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Issues related to history, tradition, culture, nationalism, belief systems
- Issues related to finance, social influence, conscious and unconscious cognitive biases and preferences
- Issues related to apathy, poor evidence, time pressures and personal experience

Differing relative weighting between the interests of humans compared with dogs can lead to widely differing final decisions and beliefs on matters pertaining to dogs. This phenomenon helps explain why humans can hold such divergent, and often polarised, views on the welfare of dogs with brachycephaly, even in the presence of the same shared evidence.

Moving towards consensus views requires agreement on the most important criteria for each decision. History has shown that re-weighting of priorities and access to new evidence has led to some dramatic changes in how society views many issues related to canine welfare. Examples of previously legal and socially acceptable practices for dogs that are now widely legislated against and are socially unacceptable include tail docking for cosmetic reasons (1) and ear cropping (2).

With this background, the BWG considers that an explicitly stated and agreed prioritisation of animal welfare above all other competing human interests will accelerate progress towards addressing many of the issues relating to dogs and particularly dogs with brachycephalism. The Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) maintains that the most fundamental criterion underpinning any decisions in relation to dogs is that *'Maximising good health, welfare and temperament overrides all other considerations for dogs'*.

Applications

The Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) suggests some opportunities for applying the consensus statement that *'Maximising good health, welfare and temperament overrides all other considerations for dogs'* in order to promote improved decision-making in relation to all dogs and especially in relation to dogs with brachycephaly.

Advertisers/influencers

- Only use images of dogs without obvious health concerns such as conformation-related abnormalities
- Understand the welfare implications from promoting examples of individual dog breeds
- When promoting individual breeds, provide balanced views that highlight relevant health concerns
- Avoid the use of brachycephalic breeds in advertising and promotions

Breeders/ breeder community

- Use and promote relevant health schemes to breeders and puppy buyers
- Openly acknowledge the health, welfare and temperament issues known to exist in individual breeds
- Use and promote the Puppy Contract for all puppy sales
- Seek veterinary advice in advance of taking breeding decisions to identify health and welfare considerations

Kennel clubs/ breed clubs

- Direct breeders and puppy buyers towards evidence-based sources of advice and help
- Ensure recommended and new health schemes are supported by an evidence base that suggests widespread use will lead to population-level health improvement
- Openly acknowledge all health, welfare and temperament issues known to exist in individual breeds and work with stakeholders to address these

- Engage with relevant stakeholders in academia and the veterinary profession to constantly review breed standards against current best evidence to ensure that health, welfare and temperament are always prioritised
- Each standard should include a plan to breed towards health as an ongoing activity
- Promote the breeding of dogs that are actively selected towards more moderate conformations
- Ensure that judges at dog shows only place animals that demonstrate healthy conformation
- Direct puppy buyers towards responsible breeders that use the Puppy Contract

Owners

- Always prioritise the needs of the dog
- Ensure the 5 Welfare Needs are met for every dog as set out under the UK Animal Welfare Acts
- Be registered with a veterinary practice

Puppy buyers

- In line with the advice from the UK Brachycephalic Working Group, '*Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog*'.
- Understand and accept that owning a dog is a long-term emotional, logistical and financial commitment
- Check that the 5 Welfare Needs of the dog can be met before deciding to get a puppy
- Undertake a pre-purchase consultation with a veterinary practice to gain advice on the most suitable breed
- Undertake in-depth research into the health and welfare issues around many breeds before making a final selection
- Use the Puppy Contract when purchasing a puppy
- Only purchase a puppy from a responsible and reputable breeder who shows evidence of good socialisation of the puppies and who uses the Puppy Contract
- Puppy buyers should only purchase dogs that have been bred from fully health tested and healthy parents

Veterinary professionals, practices and organisations

- Promote and offer pre-purchase consultations to clients
- Promote the use of the Puppy Contract
- Proactively share evidence-based breed health and welfare information with clients
- Avoid the use of images of brachycephalic animals in any practice advertising or communications
- Work with breeders to prioritise the health and welfare of breeding dogs and their puppies
- Learn about, and promote, the use of evidence-based Breed health schemes to potential breeders and owners
- Become involved in breed-related research by participating with VetCompass and by sharing data on caesarean section surgical interventions with The Kennel Club

Welfare organisations / veterinary professionals

- Provide information and advice to puppy buyers and breeders that promotes responsible purchasing decisions and breeding for good health, welfare and temperament
- Promote the use of the Puppy Contract
- Support increasing public awareness of health and welfare issues associated with specific breeds
- Promote relevant breed health schemes and direct users to further information
- Direct puppy buyers towards responsible breeders that use the Puppy Contract

References

1. Lefebvre D, Lips D, Giffroy J-M. The European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals and tail docking in dogs. *Revue Scientifique Et Technique-Office International Des Epizooties*. 2007;26(3):619.
2. Andersen SS, Meyer I, Forkman B, Nielsen SS, Sandøe P. Regulating Companion Dog Welfare: A Comparative Study of Legal Frameworks in Western Countries. *Animals*. 2021;11(6):1660.