



The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare

An all party group for members of both houses at Westminster formed to promote and further the cause of animal welfare by all means available to the Parliaments at Westminster and in Europe

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 6th December 2011 DOG BREEDING

Attendees: Vicki Craighill (PDSA), Lord McNair (ECMA), Jane Sponce (MSA), Sean Wensley (PDSA), Emma Goodman (BVA AWF), Steve Goody (Blue Cross), Jaqi Bunn (DAFG), Marc Abraham (Vet), Victoria Stillwell (Me or the Dog), David Anderson (Chance Pixies Animal Rescue), Heidi Anderson (Chance Pixies Animal Rescue), Peter Jinman (RCVS), Chrissy Smith (Dog World), Dan O'Neil (RVC), Tania Ledger (Cavalier Matters), Christina Dixon (Network for Animals), Sylvia Tabor (DTA), Lorraine Platt (Conservatives Against Foxhunting), Nicola Cooper (Dog Warden), Clarissa Baldwin (Dog's Trust), Paula Boyden (Dog's Trust), Linda Cattle (Wood Green Animal Charity), Sue Ketland (Wood Green Animal Charity), David Cavill (Animal Care College), Carol Fowler (Cavalier Campaign), Sarah Blott (AHT), Christina Dixon (Network for Animals), Claire Robinson (RSPCA), Stacey Frier (RSPCA), Marisa Heath (APGAW), Ian McParland, Sheila Crispin (Dog Advisory Council) Sally Burnell (BVA), Harvey Locke (BVA), James Yeates (RSPCA), Chris Laurence (Vet), Neil Parish MP (chairman), Lord Soulsby, Lady Fookes, Lord

Apologies: Jim Fitzpatrick MP, David Amess MP, Roger Gale MP, Cathy Jamieson MP, Andrew Rosindell MP, Sir Peter Bottomley MP, Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP, Kerry McCarthy MP,

The chairman stated that the meeting was for an update on dog breeding to establish what progress has been made since the APGAW and Bateson report two years ago. He made the point that whilst there are numerous groups who have been involved in this issue and have wide knowledge, four were asked to come forward and speak. However, one of those, the Kennel Club declined the invitation and issued the following statement:

"The Kennel Club was keen to be involved in APGAW's meeting regarding health and welfare developments in dog breeding since these are issues which we consider to be of paramount importance. However, in view of the decision to allow filming by Passionate Productions, the Kennel Club has elected not to attend since we do not trust those involved to present an unbiased account of proceedings."

The chairman informed members that the Kennel Club had come to see him to explain their decision and whilst he thought they should have attended to put their views forward, it was their decision. Leaflets were available on their latest breed standards. The chairman then invited Sheila Crispin to speak.

Marisa Heath, Secretariat

Tel: 07736 899 547 E-mail: admin@apgaw.org Website: www.apgaw.org

Sheila Crispin (Chairman of the Advisory Council for Dog Breeding)

The Advisory Council has now been in situ for a year and it is important to acknowledge that we are sustained by generous sponsorship with no government funding and that members give considerable amounts of time, energy and enthusiasm to tackling this major problem. It is also important to recognize that we have no powers of implementation and we are an advisory body.

In the last year the Council has responded to Government consultations, council members have published scientific papers and I have responded to every media request we have had. We have provided formal and informal advice on a wide range of issues to ministers and welfare groups. We are providing clear and succinct web based information with links to trustworthy sites with guidance for the public on how they buy a dog or puppy. We have produced a document setting out a standard for breeders and we believe anyone breeding any dog should meet these. This document has gone to stakeholders for comment and we are getting closer to specific recommendations. Please look at it as we welcome all comments on documents of this kind. We are in the process of looking at relevant existing legislation and the way it is enforced. There is not an appetite for new legislation so we are trying to work through existing frameworks but there will be times when we say what we have simply isn't working.

We have chosen to write a user-friendly guideline for the first 8 breed related inherited problems. That is a comprehensive list consisting of brachycephalic, airway disease, limb defects, ocular disease secondary to confirmation problem, heart disease, syringomyelia, epilepsy, skin conditions and behavioural issues arising from irresponsible breeding. We intend to give generic recommendations and then specific recommendations at the end.

The biggest challenge is a review of the existing data collection both retrospectively and prospectively. Professor Bateson stated there was a lot of information but it was not related or comparable. We are putting together a project with large funding for a review of existing retrospective and prospective data to look at how best we can coordinate efforts to make a more robust database.

James Yeates (RSPCA)

This remains a big issue and we have to both stop and also undo the problems caused by poor breeding practice. The documentary "Pedigree Dogs Exposed" raised the profile of this and since then we have had the 3 reports. The RSPCA pulled out of Crufts and we will remain so until satisfied that the problem has been addressed, we commissioned the first of the independent reports, developed the Puppy Smart website, commissioned research on attitudes on why people buy puppies, we are looking at scientific data which is lacking and we are working on a Puppy Contract and information pack.

Harvey Locke (BVA)

The veterinary profession takes this subject extremely seriously. After "Pedigree Dogs Exposed" the BVA AWF brought together the key welfare organisations to debate what steps to take forward. We then published Principles and Guidance for Those Wishing to Buy a Puppy or a Dog. The key points are every dog should be born with the best possible chance of living a healthy and happy life. All those breeding should prioritise health, welfare and temperament over appearance when choosing which animals to breed from.. All those who benefit from dogs have a collective responsibility to protect dog welfare.

The idea of the puppy contract came out of the stakeholder group. The BVA Animal Welfare Foundation and RSPCA have been working on this for nearly 2 years and it is now nearing completion. We will launch early next year. It is a legal contract with information on the puppy and parents. Prospective owners will have the information to ensure they are buying a healthy and happy puppy. You should not buy a puppy without such a contract is the central message.

The BVA and Kennel Club Canine Health Schemes for hip and elbow dysplasia and eye disease have continued. We are pleased to announce in January a new scheme for assessing syringomyelia. We are also planning to introduce a scheme for inherited heart disease.

The chairman asked three questions to panel members:

1. Since 2008, there has been a review of breed standards. These changes were not considered robust enough by some welfare groups. Do you think that more still needs to be done to ensure substantial change that improves the wellbeing of pedigree dogs?
2. On the grounds that many organisations argue that there are still problems, it is suggested that not enough has been done to improve breeding practice and reward responsible breeders? If you agree, what more needs to be done and what are you going to do and when?
3. What has each of the panel's groups done to inform consumers and does more need to be done to protect them from irresponsible breeders or inadvertently purchasing dogs from irresponsible breeders?

Sheila Crispin - I have already mentioned there should be minimum standards for all dogs. All dogs should be able to breathe through their nose whilst at rest without an open mouth. Eyes should be able to see without ocular pain or discomfort and with normal eyelid movement, tear production and distribution. All dogs should be able to exercise freely and able to mate and give birth naturally. That is an outline of what to expect from a breed standard.

This is a shared problem but we do depend on other organisations. If you are looking at a show dog as setting an example then you have to have breeders and those who judge on board otherwise it is always us and them which is the greatest block to how we progress. The frustration expressed by KC breeders is that they are trying to change breed standards and feel they are let down by those who bred for pet dogs, not necessarily show dogs. They feel they are not progressing as they wish because of the irresponsible attitudes of these types of breeders.

Consumer education is fundamental to driving change. You cannot start too young and should start with children. The council has a role to play in helping to co-ordinate this. We need good links to websites that are reputable. At the moment if I am the ignorant person buying a puppy I am going to be confused as to what a good website or guide is. That needs to be changed.

James Yeates - It is worth recognizing there have been changes in breed standards which have helped. The best way to really improve them is to think not only of appearance but also of health and temperament. There needs to be an independent review of the breed standards or clubs reviewing each others standards and a strategic management plan for each breed. "Pedigree" is not necessarily a mark of good quality.

Education can be a complex issue with genetics and business economics issues. Certainly it is more difficult for the buyer than purchasing something like a fridge. We have provided the Get Puppy Smart Campaign to assist with this. The Assured Breeders Scheme would be a valuable marker if it had the backing of other people involved but we need to be satisfied with the standards involved.

Harvey Locke - The breed standards are key and it is the pedigree dogs which are shown and in the spotlight that need to set a good example. I appreciate that breed standards are being reviewed but there needs to be more progressive revision of these standards. The language is confusing, for example; it is stated that the "basset hound will have some wrinkles of skin on lower legs but on no account must this be excessive." Yet how does someone make a judgement on what is the right amount of loose skin and what is excessive? It also states that "the body should be long and deep" but the next sentence is from "the withers to quarters it should not be unduly long" and that is confusing too and encourages breeding for extremes. 15 high profile breeds have serious problems but there is little or no mention of the problem areas flagged up to draw attention them. The KC should be more radical and aggressive in the way they word their breed standards.

The Puppy Contract is key to better breeding practice. The Assured Breeders Scheme appeals to a small minority of breeders and it doesn't attract the breeder who may only breed once or twice. We hope the Puppy Contract will be endorsed and circulated as far as possible and everyone will buy into it.

Consumer education is key because if we stop demand then the supply dries up. Educating the consumer on the emotional purchase of a puppy is difficult and all welfare organisations and vet organisation must speak with one voice and have a collective combined education programme. Defra has a big role to play in education but the Welfare Codes missed the opportunity to talk about breeding. The Scottish and Welsh codes touch on it but there is nothing on responsible breeding in the English Welfare Codes and that is a pity.

Neil Parish MP – Some breeds have very small genetic pool resulting from in-breeding so how do we break this? Is it too revolutionary to suggest that if a gene pool is too close we introduce another breed into break it up?

Harvey Locke - Some breeds do have a genetic pool so close that we will not get rid of the problem unless they start outbreeding. The Dalmation has been crossbred with a Pointer to get rid of kidney problems and this has been successful. It needs to be done scientifically.

The chairman then posed three more questions to panel members:

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1. What has been done to collect the data that was missing in 2008 to give us a clear picture of the extent of the problem?
2. Do you feel that the showing forum selects the fittest and healthiest dogs as winners? From looking at the images from 2008 to 2011 there seems, to the untrained eye, to be little improvement in the appearance of pedigree dog show winners. Does that mean there is more to be done or does it mean in 2008 winners were already the healthiest or fittest dogs?
3. Do you feel that puppy farming should be eradicated and what are you doing to assist with that?

Chris Laurence (took over from Sheila Crispin at 1900hrs Advisory Council on Dog Breeding)

It is assumed that there is data there to collect and this is one of the big issues. Data has been collected in different ways and validity is unknown. We are working on this and Sheila Crispin mentioned the project being funded by the Council to collate data.

With regards to showing it is expecting an awful lot to see a difference in one generation. There are breed clubs doing a lot to improve things and the KC have new rules on the Best of Breed at a show not going forward to the Group if they are not seen as fit and healthy by a vet and that too will encourage change. Breeders need to recognise that most of the dogs they breed end up as pets not show dogs and so they need to breed them concentrating on health and behaviour. Fit for Function Fit for Life needs to be enforced. We are making progress but it will take time is the message.

Puppy farming is not a useful label. If you have ten litters a year does that make you a puppy farmer even if you are a good breeder? The welfare of a litter of puppies born on the 14th floor of a block of flats might be worse than one coming from someone who breeds ten litters a year. Welfare needs to be looked at over the spectrum of all breeders. .

James Yeates - I agree with Chris that more data is useful but that is not to say we shouldn't do anything without data as the problems clearly exist and all data can be criticised if you want to do so. Nevertheless, data is useful, and so there are a number of projects the RSPCA have funded including the Vet Compass Project. Additionally, the BSAVA are doing work with Liverpool University and insurance data is being looked at by the Dog Breeding Advisory Council.

In showing we cannot say we have seen significant improvements. Whilst Chris might have a point that it is only one generation in terms of effects in the whole population, there could have been improvement on what dogs are taken to shows and allowed to compete. The show dogs are examples for breeders to seek to follow, so could have a significant impact.

It is true the definition of “puppy farming” is difficult but the concept does give an idea of numbers and standards, and the idea that we do not want pets treated like farm animals (whatever we think about intensively farming farm species). The RSPCA have worked on the issues of “puppy farming” for decades by working with governments and local authorities, and inspectors work hard on contraventions in the law when the laws exist.

Harvey Locke - Liverpool University have a project (SAVSNET) in partnership with the British Small Animal Veterinary Association using veterinary practice computers to harness information going through them. Vet Compass at RVC is also a great way of collecting data. The BVA/KC Canine Health Schemes have a lot of data to offer. The BVA encourages vets to report any surgery altering conformation of an animal and any dog which has had surgery to alter conformation is banned from showing. The record of the vet profession is not great on this but we are encouraging them to report these surgical corrections. We are also asking vets to report caesareans on bitches and KC has agreed to stop registering puppies born from a third caesarean. The BVA would like to see this restriction on puppies born from a second caesarean and we are talking to KC about this. The Animal Health Trust also has a huge amount of data.

Showing doesn't always select the fittest and healthiest dogs and we are seeing pictures of these dogs. It won't change overnight but more is being done now and progress for good in the showing will accelerate.

Neil Parish MP– Are the Kennel Club asking vets from the BVA to be judges?

Harvey Locke – They have a list of show vets and we are in constant discussion with the KC about who will be suitable to be show vets.

Of course puppy farming is abhorrent but it is not about numbers of litters, it is conditions, and the socializing. One key message for the public is never buy a puppy unless you see it with its mother. We need tighter regulation. Unfortunately the Welsh proposed legislation has been held up with changes in government but we hope that will move forward again. We don't want England to be left behind by devolved regions. Compulsory micro-chipping would assist in improving matters and it is an easy win for the Government through secondary legislation via the Animal Welfare Act. The Microchipping Alliance speaks with one voice in favour of compulsory microchipping. As well as the welfare benefits of reuniting strays microchipping will improve traceability of the dog back to the original breeder and this could be another nail in the coffin for puppy farms.

Baroness Fookes –Reference was made to ambiguous breed standards as issued by the Kennel Club with reference to Basset Hounds. Would it be helpful if experts drew up what they thought the ideal standards should be and then put that in front of the KC to discuss?

Mark Abraham (Vet) – Why hasn't the Government acted on the selling of puppies from petshops? Puppies should not be sold in petshops. Why are the RSPCA not focusing on inspectors working to stop puppy farming? I am organizing an event called PupAid which seeks to influence the public via celebrities on the 8th September 2012.

Gail Williams (vet physiotherapist) – as a physiotherapist I see dogs with hip and elbow dysplasia so would input from my profession be helpful as my association would be pleased to give information. Also working gundogs tend to be very healthy and sound whereas show dogs cannot compare. Can input from working gundog associations be useful?

Harvey Locke – I don't know the composition of the panel which work on breed standards but it does contain a wide range of experts including vets and reputable breeders. The expertise is already there but simply we need to look at dog breed standards 30 years ago and get back to that.

There is no one silver bullet to stop puppy farming. It requires a combination of things and it is important to realize that legislation is no good without enforcement yet local authorities are being cut and dog wardens services are being cut back. Compulsory micro-chipping that traces a puppy back to an owner would be useful and consumer education is crucial.

Veterinary physiotherapists have a role to educate owners of breeds to help them in the future.

James Yeates – The physiotherapist data would be useful and we suggest you speak to Dan O'Neil about the Vet Compass project. The working pet population certainly shows the Fit for Function idea and could be useful in that regard. Working dogs and pet dogs may have different "functions", but we would surely say that not suffering from severe health problems was important for both working and pet dogs.

The RSPCA have done a lot on puppy farming and has been the main force in tackling this, as well as the other issue of cruelty that Mark mentions. But if we don't receive a complaint about an issue we are not authorized to investigate it so Mark please let us know if you have specific cases as we are then able to investigate it.

I agree with Baroness Fookes that independent experts advising on breed standards would be helpful. This kind of input from people outside of the breed can be more objective.

Chris Laurence – Of course breed standards are important and the broader the panel of experts that set them the better. The Advisory Council accepts that most breeders of pedigrees have their dogs interests at heart but the Standard for Breeders that we have almost completed is aimed at all breeders as only a third of puppies born every year are KC registered. The standard should be enforced on the more commercial breeders and that would improve the lot of breeding stock and their puppies.

Any data is valuable and the Council would certainly like to include whatever the physiotherapists have from their work.

Nicola Cooper (Dog Warden) – Better enforcement needs better legislation. Current legislation allows someone to have 4 litters a year without a licence. Many people have one or two litters a year with no registration. Defra published the Code of Welfare for Dogs which is excellent but the public don't know it exists.

Jaqi Bunn (Dog Assessment Focus Group) - What is being done to assess behaviour health of breeding stock? We believe that dogs should pass behaviour assessment before being bred from.

David Cavil (Pet Care Trust) – I am a championship show judge and I would tell you that we as judges are coming under huge pressure from the Kennel Club to put welfare first. Things are changing but it does take a lot of time. For example; in Chow Chows they have been transformed so they look completely different to chows in U.S and Russia.

Chris Laurence - Anybody who breeds dogs at all should be on a list for Local Authorities. That way there would be traceability of pup[pies back to their breeder and local authorities can enforce legislation more effectively. Behaviour is a hugely important issue as the majority of puppies end up as pets in family homes. In terms of breed standards changing they have changed but whilst Chows may have improved you would not say the same for example about German Shepherds.

James Yeates - I agree we need tightening of regulations and empowerment of local authorities, with financial and legislative support. The issue of behaviour is vitally important, and people are disposing of dogs which have health problems or behaviour problems. Whilst they may not have made the best consumer choices they are still the victims of irresponsible breeding practices. Behaviour, health and temperament is part of being a pedigree as well as predictability of looks. Pedigrees are intended to be predictable, but it is sad if they are predictably likely to suffer health or temperamental problems. Any progress from the Kennel Club should be supported, but much more needs doing. The fact that pedigree dogs is a major problem is not a reason to go slowly – it is a reason to look for major improvements.

Harvey Locke – There is no single solution and we will need a combination of measures. The Puppy Contract will have a huge effect on stamping out irresponsible breeding. We need to develop a culture of people who will not consider buying a puppy without such a contract. Behaviour is an important element as a lot of the time dogs are abandoned because people cannot cope with their behaviour so more needs to be done there. The puppy information pack has a section on behaviour and socialisation. Vets in practice promote socialisation.

Neil Parish MP–APGAW will be asking Associate members and relevant experts for their views on where we are with this issue and what they believe needs to be done. This information will be collated and put into a short follow-up report to A Healthier Future for Pedigree Dogs. That will then be published and sent to the Minister and any other relevant stakeholder. This will enable us

to have a clear picture of what improvements should be made and how we can all work to achieve these.

Thanks to the BBC for filming today as the power of publicity will assist in ensuring we move towards improvements. There are real things for government to do including—better welfare codes, compulsory micro-chipping, preventing puppy farming and assisting in getting more information to the public. Everyone needs to be working together to deliver better dogs and to deliver the message to ensure good breeding is rewarded and bad breeding prevented.

Close of Meeting