



11 January, 2010

Heather Neil
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Dear Heather,

Further to our previous correspondence I am now enclosing our response to your document sent to us in September 09.

I had indicated that the issues would be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the ANKC Health & Welfare Committee,

However, due to the complexities of the issues you have raised, we commissioned an Expert Committee, to work over the Christmas / New Year period, to formulate our response, based on strategies we already have in place to address the majority of the items you raised. Consideration of your document will still occur at the Health & Welfare Committee meeting with reference to the ongoing implementation of our strategies.

We look forward to ongoing dialogue with the RSPCA to achieve our mutual goals.

Best wishes for the New Year.

Hugh

Hugh Gent OAM
President



Improving outcomes for Pedigree Dogs in Australia

Prior to, and in the aftermath of the BBC Documentary, "Pedigree Dogs Exposed" the ANKC had constructive dialogue with a number of organizations, including the RSPCA, who in late 2009 wrote to us seeking comment on a document entitled "Improving outcomes for Pedigree Dogs in Australia"

The ANKC has considered their proposals and our response is based around 3 main approaches:-

1. The ANKC is already heavily involved in addressing most of these issues - health and welfare are paramount to our continued existence, with the emphasis towards "fit for function, fit for life"
2. The ANKC is being very proactive wherever there is clear scientific direction.
3. The ANKC will always look in the long term for significant change - both in relation to the change of attitudes by breeders and judges but also in relation to tackling disease issues and percentages of animals adversely affected by inherited diseases.

1. Research Programs

The ANKC will continue to take a very proactive approach to improve the outcomes of breeding pedigree dogs by whatever means available at the time that are effective, reliable and repeatable. Equally, we have to be aware of the dangers of being too aggressive in disease control programs such that we do not reduce genetic variability.

All serious breeders keep very up to date with international events in their breeds which includes information on which diseases are being investigated and what tests are being developed. Further more, many will send samples to assist in the research.

On a state level, many breed clubs have instigated disease control measures that are not necessarily being done on a national level - this may include disease screening processes, self regulation and or recommended best breeding practices.

2. Disease Prevalence Data Collection and Analysis.

The LIDA database has the possibility to provide a system to determine prevalence rates for specific disorders for each registered pedigree breed. However, this is an ongoing project which will require a large amount of input and assessment over time.

The ANKC agrees that the system is limited in that it depends upon veterinarians collecting and forwarding on the information. Many of these diseases can be quite obscure and difficult to diagnose in some breeds as they may manifest at quite a young age and may fail to get diagnosed correctly. A further problem is the misidentification of breeds by Veterinarians.

Funding issues will need to be addressed in order to provide ongoing support to LIDA to increase its data collection capacity. Instigation of breeders reporting of inherited disorders to LIDA certainly is a long term possibility and would considerably widen the data base input.

Some breed clubs already have internal reporting mechanisms; however use of these is often poor but certainly can be pushed by the Health and Welfare Committee.

The ANKC is shortly to hold a Health and Welfare Committee meeting where the recording of inherited disease data is one of the major issues to be discussed. The ANKC is in the process of trying to develop its own nation wide data base for the logging the results of all inherited diseases. This will require significant funds to develop. It is envisaged that there will be both open and closed registers initially, with the end goal of having disease data results printed on pedigrees for easy access to all buyers and potential breeders. This is certainly a long term project and will take time to achieve its long term goals. (See also point 7).

3. Pedigree Analysis for all ANKC Registered Breeds

The University of Sydney is assisting the ANKC by conducting research on inbreeding co-efficients of pedigree dog data bases provided by the ANKC. Early reports show that the level of inbreeding is less than 5% across the breeds studied so far and is considerably lower in many breeds. The ANKC is looking forwards to ongoing collaboration and assistance from the Genetics Group at Sydney University. To address this ongoing process will require funding from the ANKC.

The preliminary report from Sydney University is attached to this reply.

4. Open Pedigree Studbooks

The Opening of stud books is an area that is strongly opposed by many breeders. Where this has been done as with the Low Uric Acid Dalmatians, it has been done to counteract the high uric acid problem that affects all Dalmatians. This is a very useful and purposeful exercise. These LUA dogs have now been accepted by the Kennel Club (UK).

This out crossing was done in the correct manner i.e. the breed selected was-

- a) of a similar head and body type,
- b) did not carry additional problems,
- c) did not carry the specific or target problem i.e. the high urate problem and
- d) they have avoided doubling up on the dog that was brought in.

Where this type of outcrossing is proposed, it should be done primarily *to clear/reduce a significant and specific health issue*. Great care must be used when introducing any new genetic material. The relative health conditions of each base breed must be well researched, and the resultant progeny closely monitored for a good 10-15 generations for the appearance of any new conditions. Any adverse conditions that develop should be widely notified.

This type of outcrossing already occurs in the Miniature Bull Terriers, outcrossing to standard Bull Terriers in order to decrease the incidence of lens luxation - the resultant progeny are not allowed to be bred back into the standard Bull Terrier bloodlines. This is envisioned as ongoing until such time as an accurate DNA test for the condition is developed (which has occurred in the last few months). Also, albeit on a small scale, intervarietal inbreeding is permitted in Belgian Shepherd Dogs.

Popular Sire Effect-Ideally one should promote superior sires (i.e. those with impressive disease control results) over "the stud dog of the moment", particularly if there is little or no genetic testing done on the dog and/or few progeny results. It becomes an educational process of breeders to select sires by the value of their genetic test results as well as the physical quality of their progeny.

Numerically smaller and/or rarer breeds already use regular importation of new unrelated bloodlines to keep their breeds viable. In fact, there is extensive importation of dogs of most breeds (including Australian developed breeds) due to the widespread nature of our country. Breeders often have difficulty in ensuring that the required genetic disease testing is being done appropriately prior to bringing these new animals into Australia.

5. Breed standards

Breed standards are being held up as the be all and end all of the problems in the dog world. Limited research has noted that one or more conditions *may* be related to breed standards in those standards that have been examined. The vast majority of breed standards were written over 100 years ago and have changed very little since. Problems arise over time where breeders and judges may have selected what appeared more attractive at that time.

Equally over time, this can develop in to the more exaggerated aspects seen in certain breeds.

The breed standards themselves are reasonably open documents and were written to give guidelines for breeds that were predominantly used for hunting and working purposes. The standards were intended to produce sound animals of similar type to breed on with.

Over time (100 years plus), and as fashions change, certain aspects do become altered (particularly when seen from such a distance), but rarely does the standard point the way.

The "*Fit for function, fit for life*" approach by the Kennel Club (UK) appears to be the best way to approach the selection and breeding of sound dogs into the future. It should be remembered that these problems of exaggerations of the breed standards have developed over generations of both dogs and breeders. The problems cannot be fixed in one generation but need a steady, consistent approach. Attempting to "fix" everything at once will in the vast majority of breeds result in severe number reduction which in turn would cause increased inbreeding with the remaining breeding stock.

The *health and welfare* notation that has been added to each standard is a clear statement towards the fit for function, fit for life approach. Further more judges have been clearly instructed to non award or excuse from the ring any animal that is distressed, lame or obviously unsound in any way (poor health, temperament, eye discharges etc). This is the culture we will promote so that breeders will over time not exhibit animals with problems and further, not breed with them.

The "Any departure from the foregoing..." at the end of each standard is there primarily to *avoid* exaggerations. The statement certainly does not imply that health and welfare issues are to only be considered when departures occur.

The Australian based breed standards affect some 7 breeds - the Kelpie, Cattle Dog, Stumpy Tail Cattle Dog, Border Collie, Australian Terrier, Australian Silky Terrier and more recently the Tenterfield Terrier. None of these breeds are exaggerated structurally to any degree, as the majority come from a solid agriculture working base as reflects our history and culture. These standards are maintained and monitored by the breed societies involved and must agree to any changes.

The ANKC has very little say in the alteration of any other breed standards based overseas. The ANKC is currently moving to ensure that all breeds must use the current standards, rather than a variety of different ones that were altered at different times. By moving this way, any current changes introduced in the UK based standards will be accepted automatically.

Breed Extensions is an area with continual review - this is undertaken every 5 -10 years across all breeds and is an area that could become very proactive in promoting fitness and health in breeds. These are used to educate judges and to a lesser degree breeders. A higher emphasis on health and welfare aspects as well as the fit for function can be readily brought in along with the need to avoid exaggerations.

These are all goals that will need education and a whole shift in the dog breeding fraternity philosophy towards dog breeding and exhibition. This, like any major shift, is often subtle but eventually quite profound. *"Fit for function, fit for life"* should be the eventual common goal for us all.

6. Conformation Judges and Pedigree Dog Shows

The matters discussed here have been already noted to some degree in section 5 above.

The interpretation of breed standards is certainly subjective and influenced by both time and the judges personal viewpoint. In attempting to change an entire culture to a more moderate approach, this again will take time and education.

The ANKC has a National Judges Training Scheme which standardizes the teaching material (predominantly breed standard extensions) and to a certain extent the quality of the teaching received by new judges.

The goal here will be two fold, to better educate new judges and to emphasize with the older more established judges the need to select fit healthy dogs that are not exaggerated in regard to any changed breed standards.

All alterations to the breed standards are noted and placed on the ANKC web site. A way perhaps to emphasizing any alterations and promoting fit for function, fit for life could be to have a specialized judge's notices website. Here, breeds which have had alterations to their breed standards within the last 12 months could be clearly listed.

The Swedish system of promoting healthy dogs is more related to their passing hip and or elbow schemes and a temperament or working test relevant to their function. From this the dog is then awarded its championship title. This is in fact a two tiered system but is not directly related to judging per se.

Attaching top awards such as excellent gradings to animals that have passed breed health and temperament screening is our ultimate goal. This is already being done within some of our larger breeds, notably the GSD and to a lesser extent the Rottweiler at specialty show level Australia wide. Failure to have passed both health and temperament testing results in non awarding at the highest level and restriction in advertising on a state or national basis.

Preventing main registered dogs from participating in the show ring is not possible. Certainly while we emphasise to our judges that they should non award or excuse from the ring any animal that is distressed, lame or obviously unsound in any way (poor health, temperament, eye discharges etc) [as mentioned in section 5 above], we cannot prevent them from entering dog shows. The ANKC would like to *reiterate* that the *vast majority* of inherited diseases *are not visible to the naked eye*. Judges certainly do not have, nor ever will have x ray vision and/or veterinary degrees. Unless the condition the dog has is sufficiently severe to affect its physical or mental health, or its ability to move around the ring, judges cannot be expected to penalize what is not visible.

Limiting the use of stud dogs is a very difficult area to approach, particularly at this time. There needs to be (as noted in sections 1 and 2) a far better understanding of both the diseases involved and the numbers of affected animals within breeds .i.e. solid scientific data. While there may be bad sires, equally some are very good sires and generally are because they produce sound, healthy offspring. The best way to avoid this affect is to have hereditary results regularly published in breed magazines so that all breeders can make sound decisions of which dogs they can or cannot afford to use, without limiting access to available bloodlines. Also mentioned in section 4 above.

7. Detailed Management Plans for each Registered Breed

The ANKC is in the process of moving towards developing a nation wide data base for the logging of all inherited disease test results. There will be both open and closed registers with the end goal of having disease data results printed on pedigrees for easy access to all buyers and potential breeders.

This is one of the major issues to be discussed at the upcoming Health & Welfare Committee meeting.

New DNA tests are being put on the market at an increasingly rapid rate. As these become available, more breed clearance programs are being developed. Again, the protocols for such programs are to be discussed at the same meeting. Ways of assisting breeds to develop viable disease control measures without compromising genetic viability are also a priority to this committee. Where any of these inherited diseases are *scientifically proven* to directly relate to a *component of the breed standard*, recommendations would be forth coming to the ANKC Breed Standards committee on the issue.

Where inherited diseases compromise the health and welfare of a dog we cannot at this stage exclude them from breeding unless breed restrictions, (Litter Registration Limitations) or similar measures have been imposed by the breed societies themselves. Certainly the use of accurate DNA testing of significant diseases can prevent the production of affected animals without notable loss of genetic diversity. Carriers and even affected animals can be used (in non dominant conditions) such that maximum genetic diversity is retained.

DNA testing is already widespread throughout many breeds. The Health & Welfare Committee's concerns (at this point) are more that breeders may become too enthusiastic in attempting to clear diseases by restrictive in their use of carriers such that bloodline restrictions will occur.

The development and use of EBV's in relation to hip and elbow dysplasia control is in consideration by the GSDCA at the present time. These types of systems can only be realistically used where there is very wide collection of relevant data. Only a few of the numerically larger breeds are capable of effectively applying these useful selection tools at this time. Certainly as the ANKC data bases develop over time, they will become more viable.

8. Relatedness of Mating Pairs

At the upcoming meeting of the Canine Health and Welfare Committee, the question of prohibiting first degree of inbreeding is on the agenda. Secondary to the work done by Sydney University, on our behalf (as discussed in section 3), less than 5% of registrations have this degree of inbreeding. In many breeds this figure is far lower. Therefore prohibiting father daughter, mother son and full sibling matings is quite achievable. Both the Kennel Club UK and Swedish KC have already instigated this same move. The ANKC is reasonably hopeful that this will be agreed upon at the meeting.

The advice from Sydney University also supports this move to avoid issues such as inbreeding depressing and increasing the percentage on inherited disease.

The restriction of second degree matings at this time is not felt to be warranted unless there is *scientific advice* in *specific breeds* where disease incidence has been proven to show that this move is necessary. Outcrossing we feel should only be considered where there is definite and specific disease outcomes that are desired as discussed in section 4 above.

9. Registration Rules

Changes to registration rules such that "registration should be made conditional upon both parents undergoing compulsory screening tests for these disorders."

The development of LRL's (Litter Registration Limitations) follows the agreement by breeders and owners of that breed on an Australian wide consensus (breed survey). to apply such rules In addition to the current LRL's there are several other well developed breed improvement schemes that are nearly ready to go for LRL status after a breed survey. At the upcoming meeting several issues to be discussed, relate to this area.

The Canine Health and Welfare Committee acts as an advisory body in the development and wording of breed surveys that, if adopted become LRL's. The committee tries to ensure good breeding practices are adopted such, that sensible methods of decreasing the incidences of inherited disease are achieved without significant loss of genetic variability or the production of any affected offspring.

In the area where DNA tests have not yet been identified for specific inherited diseases, most breed societies (and breeders) already limit the use of affected animals and generally try and avoid mating with known carriers. Breeders and the CRF (Canine Research Foundation) are already very actively involved in assisting research in diseases, both here and overseas, across many breeds towards developing definitive and breed specific DNA tests.

10. Expand Current Initiatives

Individual breed societies (as noted in section 9) already have input into many research programs that many not be notable on a national scene. This is occurring in many numerically smaller breeds where funding is limited within Australia. DNA Samples are sent to support disease research in many countries, principally the UK and USA.

Impetus within Australia comes secondary to University research programs, some of which are initiated by breed clubs for specific disease investigation e.g. Border Collie Club for CL and TNS - which eventually resulted in 2 breed specific DNA tests that are now used world wide.

The CRF is the funding arm of the ANKC for research into diseases in dogs. The CRF supports a range of wide spread research into many conditions that affect the health and welfare of *all dogs, not just purebred dogs* alone. Some of that research goes towards developing DNA tests for breed specific conditions.

The ANKC is also being asked to fund the development of the National Data Bases to record all this genetic information and the dollars will be being spread very thinly for the next few years if we are to achieve this goal.

11. Inadvertent Co-selection of Linked Genes

This is an area where the Health and Welfare Committee will have a watching brief and advise breed societies where there are proven clear and well defined links. Where they do occur and are known, many breeders already test where possible (BAER testing etc), and do not breed with affected animals and avoid breeding with known carriers of problems.

However many such linkages can often be very difficult to scientifically prove, particularly those directed to a physical feature. The issues are often complex and involve many subtleties including shape, looseness of ligamentation, length of limbs to mention a few.

Issues such as skin problems can often relate to immune system issues as well as exaggerations of skin type.

12. RSPCA Policy re a Compulsory Licensing System for All Breeders

ANKC breeders must undertake a comprehensive education course, and pass a theory examination, before being granted a prefix for breeding. ANKC breeders must also comply with codes of practice and ethics both from their State Bodies as well as additional requirements required within many breed societies. This covers minimum age of breeding, frequency of mating, maximum age of breeding as well as health issues in regards to vaccinations etc.

ANKC breeders are always readily "findable" via State Controlling Bodies Journals, National Canine Media, Dog Shows etc. as opposed to the unregistered puppy farmers who melt back into the woodwork as soon as a puppy has been paid for.

Although we understand it is RSPCA policy, and would have immense health and welfare benefits, we believe that a compulsory licensing system for all breeders is not feasible at this time. This opinion is based on the following considerations;

- There does not seem to be any will amongst some State Governments to implement a comprehensive licensing system, and it would need a resolution at PIMC to initiate an Australian wide agreement.

- Local Government Authorities do not have the resources to police existing legislation on Keeping & Breeding Regulations. Currently in NSW, little or no notice is taken of backyard breeders selling unmicrochipped litters (which is against the law) from either in front of their properties and via newspaper advertisements. Even if a member of the public complains about a puppy seller, Councils will only act if the purchaser is prepared to put in a complaint.

Disease testing within the puppy farming community is totally non existent, nor do they have to comply with any codes of practice such as ANKC breeders do.

- There is not, to our knowledge any Welfare Organisation, including the RSPCA, who have the manpower to ensure compliance with such a licensing system.
- People whose bitch has the one accidental litter in the backyard are unlikely to be affected by any such license (nor will ever get one).

13. Accredited Breeders

At this time some of our State & Territory Affiliates are considering introducing Accredited Breeder Schemes, similar to the one administered by the Kennel Club (UK).

This is also an Agenda Item for our upcoming Health & Welfare Committee meeting.

Conclusion.

The ANKC looks forward to continuing constructive dialogue with and input from RSPCA, Sydney University, other Universities, The Australian Veterinary Association, peak welfare bodies as well as relevant government agencies and welfare committees on these issues.

It is hoped that such dialogue and input, ultimately validated by peer reviewed scientific research will lead to the best possible outcomes for all dogs.

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President

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Canine Health & Welfare Committee

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