Kennel Club Briefing on Dog Health and Welfare

The Kennel Club is the largest organisation in the UK devoted to dog health, welfare and training. Our remit is to help ensure that dogs are happy and healthy. It aims to educate people about health issues and the importance of buying from a Kennel Club Assured Breeder – through events such as Discover Dogs, dog shows such as Crufts and through the information that it disseminates - and continually learn more about dog health by on-going investment in research and working in collaboration with others to deepen the Kennel Club’s understanding and find solutions. Funding from the Kennel Club Charitable Trust is central to this and contributes more money into improving dog health and welfare than any other organisation in the UK.

Dog training
- The Kennel Club believes training is an essential part of responsible dog ownership and that a dog is only as good as its owner. A dog is much like a child, you would not expect a child to bring itself up, learn what is right and wrong, socialise itself – these vital things must be learnt from those around them – which in a dog’s case is its owner. Any dog has the potential to be aggressive - or indeed be a well-behaved pet. This depends on the training and socialisation it has received from its owner and not its appearance or breed.

- The Kennel Club Good Citizen Dog Scheme is the largest dog training scheme in the UK. Its aim is to promote responsible dog ownership and in turn, enhance our relationship with our pets and to make the community aware of the benefits associated with dog ownership.

Identification
- The Kennel Club believes permanent identification, such as compulsory microchipping, is an essential element of responsible dog ownership and as such applauded the government’s decision to introduce regulations.

- The Kennel Club manages Petlog, the UK’s largest lost and found database for microchipped pets, which was established to help reunite lost dogs with their owners. In support of the government’s plans, it gifted microchip scanners to every local authority in England and Wales and will soon be donating scanners to smaller rescue centres. The Kennel Club is dedicated to reuniting dog and owner through Petlog, and holds National Microchipping Month each June to educate those involved with dogs on the benefits of microchipping.

- Compulsory microchipping will go a long way towards helping to promote animal welfare and responsible dog ownership and bring dogs and owners back together more quickly and effectively. The Microchipping Alliance, of which the Kennel Club is a member, supports this principle and estimates that annual cost savings to local authorities relating to dog welfare alone could be between £20.8 million and £23.2 million from the first year of introducing this legislation.

Improving Health
- The Kennel Club unfortunately has no jurisdiction over the 60 percent of dogs in the UK that do not come into its remit and it is therefore impossible to know whether every dog in this country is being bred the right way, with no exaggerations. However, dog shows remain a major platform to see whether a dog has exaggerated features and to reward those which don’t, thereby encouraging healthy dog breeding.
The Kennel Club believes that the total number of litters a licensed bitch should produce over her lifetime should be reduced to 4. The Kennel Club refuses to register puppies from a bitch that has had more than 4 litters. Puppy farmers breed from bitches over and over again, the current legal limit of litters a bitch should have is 6 but the Kennel Club feels this is too high.

The Kennel Club refuses to register any puppies born to a bitch that has previously had two caesarean sections, as this could indicate an underlying health problem that means they should not be having more puppies.

The Kennel Club currently uses its extensive pedigree data to feed into research at the Kennel Club Genetics Centre at the Animal Health Trust. This research helps to understand more about diseases in dogs, to develop DNA tests for them and to give breeders information, via its Mate Select website, that helps them to make more informed choices. The Kennel Club would welcome further collaboration from the vet profession and insurance companies to feed even more data into the Mate Select system.

The Kennel Club educates those who register with it about the importance of health testing and research shows that those who register with the Kennel Club are far more likely to health test than those who do not.

**Breed Standards**

Breed standards are regularly reviewed by the Kennel Club in conjunction with the veterinary profession and other experts and can be amended and/or updated up to four times a year. It also undertook a major review of every breed standard in 2009 to ensure that they contain no wording that could be interpreted as encouraging exaggeration that might lead to health concerns and to make it absolutely clear that health must always come first.

The Kennel Club would highlight that a Breed Standard only influences those who breed pedigree dogs under the Kennel Club umbrella. Further changes to Breed Standards would therefore have no impact on those who breed irresponsibly such as puppy farmers or breeders of 'designer crossbreeds' who breed dogs with no regard to the compatibility of the breeds and potential health risks, as they have no relevance to this sector of the dog breeding community.

**Puppy Farming**

The Kennel Club campaigns for an end to the cruel puppy farming trade and believes that principles and standards similar to those followed by members of the Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme should be made mandatory for all breeders, as most breeders are currently effectively unregulated.

The Kennel Club formed the Assured Breeder Scheme in 2004 to allow responsible breeders to come together as one group, for the benefit of puppy buyers. These breeders promise to follow certain standards of care that will give their puppies the best possible chance of leading healthy, happy lives, such as giving their dogs the required health tests, socialising their puppies and giving Kennel Club Inspectors access to their premises.

The Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme was identified as the best example of a welfare scheme for breeders that exists in the UK by Professor Bateson’s Independent Inquiry into Dog Breeding and could be central to eradicating puppy farming. Since the inquiry the Kennel Club has received UKAS accreditation, further demonstrating that it is confident to stand by the practices that it adopts and open itself up to scrutiny. The Kennel Club believes similar standards to those adopted by members of the Assured Breeder Scheme should be made mandatory for anyone breeding dogs.

**Commercial dog breeding and licensing**
• Those who breed 5 or more litters a year usually require a breeding licence by their local authority. To register with the Kennel Club, those breeding 5 or more litters a year must have been inspected by the Kennel Club or provide a local authority licence.

• Whilst the Kennel Club fully supports the need to ensure that breeders are complying to acceptable welfare standards it is concerned that simply reducing the threshold by which a breeder must obtain a licence would have the opposite effect by wasting limited local authority resources inspecting small scale breeders and delaying the time it takes to get to the disreputable establishments.

• The Kennel Club questions how effective enforcement can be assured without the danger of local authorities adopting a ‘low hanging fruit’ approach of conducting inspections on small scale, responsible breeders who pose no risk and therefore pass inspection quickly and easily as opposed to dealing with the more difficult, unscrupulous breeders who may require more time and resources.

• Instead the Kennel Club would recommend a proportionate risk based inspection practice as evidenced by many inspectorates within the government agencies. A standard should be the basis of inspection with anyone complying considered as low risk and inspected less frequently. The Kennel Club’s Assured Breeder Scheme could help accommodate this process.

• The Kennel Club would welcome legislation to require all breeders to use the relevant health tests. In the absence of legislation the Kennel Club cannot make health testing mandatory for all breeders, as registration with the Kennel Club is voluntary and mandating would risk driving people away from its sphere of influence and education. The number of breeders registering dogs with the American Kennel Club dropped drastically when it insisted on mandating certain breeding requirements in the 1990’s. The number of puppies being born in the U.S did not reduce however, meaning that puppies still continue to be born but without the American Kennel Club having any influence. By educating and encouraging breeders to adopt better breeding practices, whilst also taking tougher action when necessary, the Kennel Club is committed to improving the health and welfare of all dogs so that they may live long and happy, healthy lives.