

Bulldog Clubs: Speaking notes Nawac Presentation (22 May 2019)

My name is Loretta Lovell I am a French bulldog breeder, committee member of bulldog clubs and co Ordinator of their taskforce.

I am also a lawyer with 20 odd years' experience in commercial and public law. I am here on behalf of the clubs to provide a short overview of the work we are doing.

I have provided a print version of our presentation.

But given we have limited time I propose to give a short overview and then allow time for any questions you may have of me.

Who are we?

There are 5 Bulldog Clubs ("**Clubs**") across the country. They are recognised or affiliated clubs to DogsNZ. At the end of 2016 the Clubs chose to come together and work on common issues for our breeds. They established the Bulldog Club Taskforce ("**Taskforce**") to act as their administrative arm for joint projects and gave it a terms of reference that the Taskforce works to.

There are members of all 5 Club committees on the Taskforce who provide assistance on the range of activities the Clubs need. Many are also actively on social media and administrators of some of the biggest British or French bulldog groups and pages in New Zealand. All the Clubs have their own pages and most have their own websites as well.

Our two breeds have (at least with the French bulldogs) gone from relative anonymity to the breeds dejour. This has meant that unlike when I brought my first frenchie there were a handful of breeders, now there are many many more and as clubs we have to find ways to engage with them and with the public who just want a new member for their families.

What we are doing?

The emphasis of the Clubs has therefore been advocacy and education. To this end they have:

- a. joined as Clubs to work collaboratively for the betterment of our breeds. This includes a common code of conduct between all the Clubs. While reflecting the points in the DogsNZ Code of Conduct there are other matters that are specific to our breeds that we would also like to include.
- b. engaged and consulted with Club members and breeders on key issues this includes the breed standards. The British Bulldog Breed Standard is currently being consulted on.
- c. worked with breeders and vets to develop a health scheme for each of our breeds and to improve the overall health of our dogs.
- d. developed resources to help breeders and potential pet owners with key issues such as:
 - a. what a responsible breeder is and the questions to ask when considering whether a bulldog or Frenchie is the right breed for you and who you want to buy one from;
 - b. what should be in information packs including health and helpful information for new owners; and
 - c. template contracts that breeders can use.
- e. engaged with the public at dog shows, expos, pet walks and on social media.
- f. advocated and engaged with key stakeholders including yourselves, officials and the minister, trademe and insurance companies to build relationships and an understanding of the work we are doing and to understand the issues.

Attached to the handout are examples of the work we have been doing:

- a. an information paper for breeders and the public on the two health schemes the Clubs are trialling;
- b. a table of the proposed tests at bronze, silver and gold levels for the French bulldog. You will see that this includes breathing testing including nostril assessments, the ETT and BOAS chamber when available;
- c. the bronze level vet instruction form for the French bulldog; and
- d. the ETT vet instructions from Cambridge University.

We have also provided examples of the education resources we are developing or using. There are more but this gives you some insight. They include

- a. For someone wanting to start looking for a breeder: a list of things to consider when looking for a responsible breeder;
- b. For the family that is taking a puppy home: A checklist of information for breeders. A short fact sheet for frenchies and an information booklet which form part of induction packs for new owners; and
- c. We have also brought along a puppy booklet we also provide as part of the induction package. It was written by a breeder of French bulldogs and vet for our sister club the French Bulldog Club of NSW. It provides more detail on health.

We are still working and will keep doing so. We simply wanted the opportunity to let you know that as Clubs we are not deaf to concerns and the Clubs are working hard too.

Specific Comments

The Health schemes: Further Detail

The Clubs consulted on the types of health schemes members wanted. The response from members was clear. Our health schemes had to be:

- a. **Comprehensive** - providing guidelines and testing relating to the conformation of the whole dog not just one issue.
- b. **Breeder led and developed** – Bulldog and French bulldog breeders needed to help to develop the tests.
- c. **Specialist Review** – working with the vets who are brachycephalic specialists and understand our breeds to develop the testing and the forms. Utilising forms and requirements for grading of proven international health organisations including Penn Hip, Orthopaedic Foundation for Animals in the US, Sydney University and Cambridge University.
- d. **Provable** – with certificates for each level which can be promoted with the public as proof of testing.
- e. **Accessible** – tests need to be accessible to breeders in both the North Island and South Island and should not be captured.
- f. **Responsible** – Breeders and clubs needed to be confident that their information would be respected and protected. Not used for purposes they had not intended and only shared with the consent of the owners.
- g. **Engaged** - take an education and inclusive approach rather than use force. Mandatory schemes were viewed as more likely to alienate and we would lose the opportunity to bring in breeders who were new to the breeds or not engaged with the clubs.

We have had a good coverage of breeders both North and South Island joining the schemes and we are promoting it. It will take time to build but such schemes have been very successful overseas with thousands of dogs going through them over time, which has to improve the overall quality of the breeds.

In the short term we will review the schemes and make changes over time including the option of moving the ETT to bronze level once we have accessibility sorted out.

In the medium to long term like the Rottweiler breeders who have taken the time they needed to build breeder support we will ask members whether they wish to place some or all of their tests under the DogsNZ Litter Registration Limitation Scheme (**LRL**). Like the other breeds such a decision must be Club and member driven.

Practically we are trying to provide the resources for our breeders that they want and need to use health tested dogs in their breeding program and make informed decisions. In addition to seeing health testing increase, we are seeing more owners of sires wanting to know about health testing as part of approvals. We are seeing the public asking about health testing which is further impetus for breeders.

Our approach, resources and mentoring are intended to help to engage and assist new and existing breeders. We don't want to risk losing them before they understand the value of health testing their dogs and breeding healthy bulldogs and French bulldogs. If we lose them because the entry to health schemes or registration is too hard or mandatory, they will likely leave and breed without oversight and join the mass of non-registered breeders who breed without reference to a standard, testing or the future of our breeds. That would be a significant loss. It is also a key difference and philosophy between the Club Health schemes and the DogsNZ mandatory LRL regime.

What is our relationship with DogsNZ?

As we have said the 5 Bulldog Clubs are either DogNZ recognised or affiliate Clubs and our members are also DogsNZ members. So, there is a connection there. However again the Taskforce work is not connected to DogsNZ. The Taskforce is a conduit for the Clubs to work together and provide engine room support. It is not a legal entity.

The Clubs participate in consultations and voice their views on breed specific matters as well. However, the Club health schemes are not under the control of DogsNZ and we are clear about that in our paperwork and with our members.

While there may be the perception of duplication of work between the Clubs and DogsNZ we would say our approach is to develop and refine resources so that they reflect the needs of our two breeds. It is not our intent to replicate the wheel, rather it is to ensure that key documents and resources are fit for purpose for our breeds. Further as clubs we are more flexible to change and can develop our policies in line with need.

A joint Bulldog Club code of conduct is an example, another are the Club Health Schemes. Both are reflective of specific issues that we want to address which may not be by the wider DogNZ ones. A Bulldog Club code of conduct for example could consider things such as a lesser age for breeding (8 years is likely too old for our breeds), and matters not dealt with in the DogsNZ code but still of importance to our clubs and breeders ranging from sales to pet stores and sites that don't place welfare first to matters relating to surgical intervention. As we have said above our approach with the health testing is to engage, support and bring breeders into the schemes. We do not take a coercive approach. That does not diminish the relevance of our health schemes because they are not

mandatory, we are just taking a different path (and one we feel will work better with the Clubs members) to improved health with our breeds.

Bulldog Breed Standard

The proposed changes are currently being consulted on by the Clubs with their members. While I don't want to presume what their views will be. However, I will say that when consulted last year on the majority of submitters opposed change.

I will also say that I think the issues we face cannot be put down to a breed standard alone. It is subjective and therefore subject to interpretation.

So, anything you can do to help with that interpretation is a good step. As a lawyer I would say that a good comparative are local government plans which provide not only rules and policies but also guiding principles for their interpretation. DogsNZ has developed language which will help with the interpretation of breed standards as a whole.

Our Breed Standards with the addition of guidelines to interpretation do not place aesthetics over health. Bulldogs and French Bulldogs bred to the Breed Standard can and are Healthy.

More widely it is the work on health testing and education that will improve Bulldog health. Speaking to other health co Ordinator's in the UK and US they have said that changes to breed standards in their countries have not had the effect that long-term health testing and developments in health have had. In the UK there has been over 10,000 bulldogs through the scheme that has to have an effect on the breeds health overall. OFA has thousands of graded dog profiles too.

Health tested dogs in such countries where many of our sires come from can only be good here too.

Responsible breeding

The Clubs recognise that there are concerns and we share them when we see articles about puppy mills and pet stores. The clubs are responding to these issues with a range of tools and will continue to do so.

A core tool the clubs use is to educate and give the public the information needed to distinguish responsible breeders from the unscrupulous. As noted above we have been:

- Developing educational resources such as what responsible breeders look like and the questions the public should ask when considering buying from a breeder.
- Health testing certificates that breeders can show and advertise to confirm they have met testing requirements.
- Information packs for pet owners and clear concise contracts focussed on welfare and not just payment.
- Contract templates providing clear terms for breeders and owners alike.
- A common code of conduct including common expectations of care and breeding that the Clubs and responsible breeders as a whole can promote.

Those resources are available to breeders who are Club members and non-members alike and to the public. Our messages on responsible breeders and breeding are strongly promoted on social media and in large groups where potential pet owners are seeking information. Those messages have been out there among our groups for a few years now and we are seeing at least with our breeds more people asking questions when buying pups and dogs.

Part of that is also about the public learning that they should be able to meet with breeders and expect their pups to be well socialised and that the little puppy in the pet store window is not always healthy or socialised nor are they from health tested parents. We post articles and information on these points on social media and will be doing more work on this as part of our advocacy and education.

The Clubs also took a strong stance with Trademe when they chose to not allow the sale of our breeds. Not because individual breeders wanted to use the platform, many of us didn't. But because we were concerned that in choosing to make that decision this created a gap for new websites which do not have the welfare policies or public oversight that trademe does. And that is what we saw sites and Facebook pages set up and running the day after trademe banned the sale of the three breeds. These sites are obvious opportunities for unscrupulous breeders to sell their dogs to the unsuspecting public.

On a more personal level our breeder and pet owner resources are intended to ensure that the public can access information about what they should be looking for. We do not understate in our resources and public engagements the need to ask questions and get a puppy from a responsible breeder. We of course cannot force the public to take that advice but we can but try.

Should we be further registered and regulated?

We have seen recent media statements including the HUHANZ petition and the interview with the SPCA a few weeks back. We understand the push to improve. However, breeders such as myself are already registered under DogsNZ. We are visible and accessible. We have rules we must comply with and we are self-regulating as well through both DogsNZ and the clubs.

Further registration or regulation requirements should be carefully considered so they don't have unintended consequences. Responsible breeders have a place. Their dogs don't end up in shelters or rescues. They are the breeders you want.

We would suggest you don't want to regulate the responsible breeders out of existence while trying to catch the unscrupulous. Those people won't care about regulations and will likely go underground, as happened with other regulated breeds. As Clubs we will do all we can to bring breeders into the fold and to engage them with support and learning. Our focus is on our breeds, their welfare, health and temperament.

As always with legislation and regulations it comes down to the intent and the drafting. We consider that we have a grassroots viewpoint that can help to inform the development of such policy.

Conclusion

The Bulldog Clubs are working hard to respond to the NAWAC Opinion on Selective Breeding and to improve the health of our breeds. It is our focus to ensure that owners enjoy our breeds and that our British and French bulldogs have long happy lives in loving homes.

If you have any questions please feel free to ask and if I don't have the answers, I will ask the Clubs and provide a written response.

Loretta Lovell

Bulldog Club Taskforce Co-Ordinator