

# Responsible companion animal breeding

(adopted 28/08/09)

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 RSPCA Australia encourages prospective companion animal owners to consider adopting an animal from the RSPCA or another reputable animal welfare organisation. However, where animals are obtained from other sources, the RSPCA advocates that, wherever possible, they are acquired directly from the place where they were born, i.e. from the breeder of the animal (see Policies A2.2 and A2.3).
- 1.2 RSPCA Australia advocates the compulsory registration and licensing of all companion animal breeders, with the conditions under which animals are bred, kept and presented for sale being detailed in a code of practice, and where compliance with the code of practice is a condition of licensing (see Policy A2.4).
- 1.3 This document outlines RSPCA Australia's position on responsible companion animal breeding through a set of ten key principles, summarised in Box 1. The advice given here applies mainly to breeders of dogs and cats, however the general principles are relevant to breeders of other companion animals, such as rabbits, rats, mice, guinea pigs, ferrets, and birds.
- 1.4 For the purpose of this document, the term 'breeder' refers to any person engaged in breeding and selling companion animals. It includes breeders of purebred (pedigree) companion animals (including those registered with breed associations) as well as breeders of crossbred or non-pedigree animals.
- 1.4 This document must be read in conjunction with the following RSPCA policies:
  - Policy A1 Responsible companion animal ownership
  - Policy A2 Acquiring a companion animal
  - Policy A5 Breeding of companion animals

### **Box 1: Key principles for responsible companion animal breeding**

A responsible companion animal breeder:

- 1 Conscientiously attempts to match the demand for animals with the supply
- 2 Provides a high standard of care and living conditions for their animals
- 3 Demonstrates knowledge of and a genuine concern for the welfare of the animals in their care
- 4 Is open, transparent and provides a complete history of the animal
- 5 Ensures compatibility between the owner and the animal
- 6 Demonstrates a genuine concern for the welfare of future generations of animals
- 7 Provides ongoing support and information to the new owner
- 8 Provides a guarantee
- 9 Readily provides references on request
- 10 Complies with relevant local and state/territory legislation and codes of practice including any registration and licensing requirements.

**b Key principles for responsible companion animal breeding****2.1 *A responsible breeder conscientiously attempts to match the demand for animals with the supply***

- a The breeder knows the likely demand for their animals and plans future breeding programs accordingly to reduce the chances of oversupply and consequent euthanasia of healthy animals (see Policy A5.1). Where appropriate, breeders should place prospective owners on a waiting list in order to ensure there is adequate demand prior to breeding.
- b Where supply exceeds demand, any unsold animals are provided with a high standard of housing and care on the premises either permanently or until they can be re-homed.

**2.2 *A responsible breeder provides a high standard of care and living conditions for their animals***

- a Veterinary health checks are performed on each litter including a full physical examination and health assessment to detect any hereditary or congenital defects or health problems and to ensure medical treatment is provided if required. Routine treatments and preventative medicine programs are practised, e.g. pups or kittens are vaccinated, and treated for worms and fleas. Prospective owners are provided with copies of veterinary certificates and other documentation about health status and any treatments given.
- b Living conditions are of a high standard - the environment is clean and the animals' physiological and behavioural needs are being met. There is adequate space, shelter, environmental stimulation and the opportunity to exercise.
- c Animals are provided with a balanced and biologically appropriate diet (including water) based on up-to-date nutritional advice. Information on feeding requirements given to prospective owners is appropriate.
- d Animals are fit and in good health.
- e All animals are well socialized to humans and con-specifics, and demonstrate normal behavioural reactions with no overt signs of fear or aggression.
- f Veterinary care and attention is provided to all animals when necessary.

**2.3 *A responsible breeder demonstrates knowledge of and a genuine concern for the welfare of the animals in their care***

- a The breeder consults with their veterinarian to determine the most appropriate individual breeding program for each breeding animal. Aspects such as the age of breeding commencement; the frequency of pregnancies; the time/age for retirement; the mating procedure and the provision of veterinary care during breeding and on retirement, should be included.
- b Retired breeding animals, animals that are unable to breed or animals that are unsuitable for breeding, are desexed and either provided with a high standard of housing and care on the premises or re-homed. Animals are not euthanased when they

reach the end of their breeding life unless, following consultation with a vet, it is deemed necessary and in the best interests of the animal.

- c The breeder consults with their veterinarian and other experienced breeders to determine best practice rearing and weaning methods for the offspring in the litter.
- d The breeder does not cull (or have euthanased) healthy offspring simply because they do not conform to a 'breed standard' or because the breeder considers there is an excess number in the litter.
- e The breeder does not subject animals to any surgical modification or intervention unless the procedure is deemed necessary for the welfare of the animal by a veterinarian. In the case of dogs, the breeder does not allow the docking of puppies' tails.
- f The breeder minimises stress to the offspring by ensuring that their animals are offered for sale directly from the place where they were born.
- g The breeder is aware of the importance of socialisation of young animals, especially during critical periods in early development (e.g. 3-17 weeks of age for pups). The breeder takes active steps to adequately socialise animals on the premises prior to their sale. The breeder also ensures breeding animals are well-socialised.
- h Where animals are not required for breeding, they should be desexed prior to sale (where appropriate for the species and age of the animals).
- i Dogs and cats are microchipped prior to sale (other animals where appropriate for the species).
- j Information is provided to prospective owners, such as animal care notes, which cover diet, socialization, registration and identification requirements and any medications given prior to purchase and those required in the future. Notes should include vaccination card, microchip number and previous worming schedule where relevant. Specific information on the need for early desexing is provided with all cats and dogs sold.

2.4 ***A responsible breeder is open, transparent and provides a complete history of the animal***

- a The breeder encourages, where possible, prospective owners to see the litter with their mother (dam) and to meet the father (sire) of the litter. Where the sire is not present on site, information is provided on his background, size, breed and temperament.
- b The breeder encourages prospective owners to inspect the breeding facilities and the general environment.
- c The breeder is willing to answer questions and allow inspection of relevant paperwork and records.

**2.5 *A responsible breeder ensures compatibility between the owner and animal***

- a The breeder makes every effort to meet with the prospective owner in person to assess the compatibility of the animal with the owner. If a face-to-face meeting is not possible then extensive telephone interviews are carried out.
- b The breeder asks the prospective owner relevant questions to determine the compatibility of the owner and the animal and to ensure the animal will be well cared for. For example, whether there are children or other animals in the household, how the animal will be housed; how it will be cared for during working hours, holidays or if their circumstances change. The breeder may use a questionnaire for prospective owners to assist in the matching process.
- c The breeder ensures prospective owners have a realistic understanding of the characteristics of the breed and their requirements for space and activity. In this way the breeder tries to ensure a good match between the owner and the animal (e.g. matching a working dog with an owner who can provide an appropriate environment and the additional stimulation a working dog generally requires).

**2.6 *A responsible breeder demonstrates a genuine concern for the welfare of future generations of animals***

Protecting the welfare of future generations of animals is achieved firstly by breeders acknowledging the presence of any inherited disorders or exaggerated anatomical features that may compromise quality of life in their particular breed and in their own animals. These disorders are then actively addressed by engaging in best practice breeding programs which entail the following:

- a *Screening breeding animals for genetic disorders and excluding animals with negative characteristics from breeding programs*
  - The breeder is aware, through education and consultation with veterinarians, geneticists, other breeders and breed associations, of the common genetic disorders and negative characteristics known for that particular breed or mixture of breeds (see DPIV 2008).
  - The breeder screens their breeding animals using all available tests relevant to the breed. For example, for canine hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia and DNA tests for progressive retinal atrophy in certain dog breeds.
  - Where an animal exhibits or produces offspring with an inherited disorder or characteristic that has been identified as compromising the animal's quality of life, health or welfare, that animal is excluded from breeding and is desexed. These animals may still be able to lead full and healthy lives and should not be euthanased unless it is deemed to be their best interests, following consultation with a vet (see 2.3d).
  - The breeder readily supplies the prospective owner with copies of certified medical reports and the results of screening tests.
  - If requested, the breeder willingly provides information regarding the incidence of genetic diseases in their animals to veterinarians and researchers to add to existing knowledge of the breed.

- b *Not breeding closely related animals to avoid problems associated with inbreeding*

The breeder does not allow closely related animals to breed together, e.g. father to daughter, brother to sister or grandfather to granddaughter. Breeding closely related animals results in a lack of genetic diversity, which can seriously compromise immune system function, may increase the incidence of recessive inherited disorders and can ultimately lead to serious infertility problems.

- c *Not breeding for traits that are detrimental to the animal's welfare or quality of life*

A good breeder will select for traits that are compatible with a high quality of life for the animal and not prioritise appearance over functionality. Responsible breeders consider the health, welfare, temperament and the quality of life of both the parents and their offspring as a key priority when selecting breeding stock.

2.7 ***A responsible breeder provides ongoing support and information to the new owner***

The breeder provides their full contact details and encourages the new owner to contact them should they require further information on the care of their new animal.

2.8 ***A responsible breeder provides a guarantee***

- a The breeder offers to accept any returned or unwanted animals within a specified time period (e.g. up to 3 months after sale). Animals may be returned during this period for various reasons, including problems with health, behaviour, compatibility, or providing suitable care. Breeders should accept animals returned as a result of problems arising from an inherited disorder at any time after sale.
- b Where possible, the breeder should re-home returned animals. If they cannot be rehomed or sold, the breeder will undertake to house them. Breeders must have the capacity to provide a high standard of living and care for returned animals. Returned animals are not euthanased unless it is deemed necessary and in the best interests of the animal following consultation with a vet.
- c Information gained from a returned animal should be used to improve breeding, rearing and socialisation practices in the future.

2.9 ***A responsible breeder readily provides references on request***

The breeder readily provides references on request. References may include testimonials from previous or existing owners; letters from the breeder's vet and other professional references from reputable organisations.

2.10 ***A responsible breeder complies with relevant local and state/territory legislation and codes of practice***

The breeder complies with all relevant local and state/territory legislation and codes of practice relating to the breeding, care and welfare of companion animals, including any registration and/or licensing requirements.

**References**

- Higgins A & Nicholas FW (2008) The breeding of pedigree dogs: Time for strong leadership. *The Veterinary Journal* 178(2):157-158
- McGreevy PD (2007) Breeding for Quality of Life. *Animal Welfare* 16(S): 125-128
- McGreevy PD & Nicholas FW (1999) Some Practical Solutions to Welfare Problems in Dog Breeding. *Animal Welfare*, 8: 329-341
- Rooney N & Sargan D (2009) *Pedigree dog breeding in the UK: a major welfare concern?* RSPCA (UK).
- DPIV (2009) Code of Practice for the Responsible Breeding Of Animals with Heritable Defects that cause Disease. Bureau of Animal Welfare, Victorian Government Department of Primary Industries, Melbourne, Australia. Available at: [www.dpi.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare)

**Information sources**

- Australian Veterinary Association – Elbow and Hip dysplasia available at: <http://avacms.eseries.hengsystems.com.au/Content/NavigationMenu/Community2/HipandElbowDysplasiaAnalysis/default.htm>
- Australian National Kennel Council: <http://www.ankc.org.au/home/default.asp>
- Australian Association of Pet Dog breeders (AAPDB): <http://www.aapdb.com/>
- Listing of Inherited Disorders in Animals (LIDA): <http://www.vetsci.usyd.edu.au/lida/>
- Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) website to provide advice on genetic welfare problems of companion animals: <http://www.ufaw.org.uk/UFAWWelfareandBreedingInitiative.php>
- Victorian Code of Practice for the Operation of Breeding and Rearing Establishments: <http://www.new.dpi.vic.gov.au/notes/agg/code-of-practice-for-the-operation-of-breeding-and-rearing-establishments>