

# Responsible companion animal breeding

(adopted 04/10/2018)

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document must be read in conjunction with the following RSPCA policies and documents:
  - Policy A Companion animals
  - RSPCA Smart Puppy and Dog Buyer's Guide
  - RSPCA Smart Kitten and Cat Buyer's Guide
  - RSPCA Discussion paper - Legislating to End Puppy Farming - The Way Forward
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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 mixed bred or other non-pedigree animals.

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

A responsible companion animal breeder:

- 1 Plans breeding and conscientiously matches the demand for animals with the supply
- 2 Provides a high standard of care and living conditions for their animals that meet their physiological, behavioural and social needs
- 3 Demonstrates knowledge of and a genuine concern for the health and 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 health and welfare of future generations of animals by avoiding breeding animals with inherited disorders, exaggerated features that compromise welfare or temperaments unsuitable for companion 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, codes of practice and animal welfare standards including any registration and licensing requirements.

## Key principles for responsible companion animal breeding

- 1 **A responsible breeder plans breeding and conscientiously matches the demand for animals with the supply**
  - a The breeder knows the likely demand for their animals and plans future litters accordingly to reduce the chances of oversupply and consequent euthanasia of healthy animals (see Policy A5). 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 care and living conditions on the breeder's premises either permanently or until they can be re-homed.
  
- 2 **A responsible breeder provides a high standard of care and living conditions for their animals**
  - a Veterinary health checks are carried out on the mother and each litter in the home soon after birth and thereafter as needed. This should include a full physical examination and health assessment to detect any hereditary or congenital defects or health problems and to ensure medical treatment is provided as required. Best practice preventative health programs are practised, e.g. pups or kittens are vaccinated, and treated for external and internal parasites. 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 hygienic and the animals' physiological, behavioural and social needs are met. There is adequate space allowing free movement, shelter, environmental enrichment, socialisation and the opportunity to exercise daily. Additionally, the breeder proactively ensures all their animals are provided with positive experiences (e.g. playing with a sociable companion) each day with negative experiences minimised to ensure a good quality of life. The breeding environment should mimic the environment the animal will be rehomed into - e.g. a family home, with socialisation matching the future environment.
  - c Animals are provided with a balanced and biologically appropriate diet based on contemporary nutritional science, in a quantity which results in ideal body condition. Clean drinking water must be freely available at all times. Information on feeding requirements given to prospective owners is appropriate.
  - d Animals are physically fit and in good mental and physical health.
  - e All animals are well socialised to humans and conspecifics (other animals of their species), and demonstrate normal behavioural reactions with no abnormal signs of fear or aggression.
  - f Care and attention is provided by a registered veterinarian to all animals when necessary, and in addition to the regular care outlined in the breeder's [health management plan](#).

- 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 a registered veterinarian first to determine the most appropriate individual breeding program for each breeding animal. Aspects such as the suitability of the animal for breeding (physical health and suitable temperament); 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. The breeder and veterinarian ensure that the mating procedure does not compromise animal welfare.
  - b Retired breeding animals, animals that are unable to breed, or animals that are unsuitable for breeding are provided with a high standard of living (see 2b) on the premises or re-homed. These animals should be desexed where this is deemed in the best interests of the animal by a registered veterinarian. Animals are not killed when they reach the end of their breeding life unless, following consultation with a registered veterinarian, it is deemed necessary and in the best interests of the animal based on animal welfare grounds.
  - c The breeder consults with a registered veterinarian and other experienced breeders to determine best practice rearing and weaning methods for the offspring in the litter.
  - d The breeder does not kill healthy offspring simply because they do not conform to a 'breed standard', certain aesthetic 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 and undertaken by a veterinarian for the welfare of the animal for therapeutic reasons. If such intervention is required to correct an inherited issue, these animals should not be used for breeding. In the case of dogs, the docking of puppies' tails and the cropping of ears for cosmetic or prophylactic purposes are illegal in Australia.
  - 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 and safely socialise animals to other animals and people on the premises and ensures they are exposed to different environments.
  - h Where animals are not required for breeding, they should be desexed prior to sale (where appropriate for the species, age and health status of the animals). If the animals are not desexed prior to sale for any of the aforementioned reasons, a desexing voucher or formal agreement should be entered into with the new owner.
  - i Dogs and cats are microchipped and registered to an appropriate microchip database prior to sale such that the breeder is traceable via each individual's microchip number (other animals where appropriate for the species). Breeders should obtain a signature on the microchip transfer form from the purchaser and submit the form on behalf of themselves and the purchaser. A copy of the signed form should be provided to the purchaser.

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

- a The breeder allows and encourages prospective owners to inspect the breeding facility in person to meet the litter and their mother (and the father (sire) of the litter if he is present). Where the father is not present on site, information is provided on his location, background, health, size, physical characteristics, and temperament.
- b The breeder provides information to prospective owners on the care needs of the animal and any breed-specific traits or known genetic or congenital problems as well as the breeding practices employed by the breeder.
- c The breeder is willing to answer questions, allow inspection of relevant paperwork and records and provide ongoing support to owners.

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

- a The breeder makes every effort to meet 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 this assessment should be made via video or phone. Breeders must sell animals directly to prospective owners and not via a third-party or broker.
- 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 specific animal 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 an active energetic dog with an owner who can provide an appropriate environment and the additional stimulation/exercise required).

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

- a. Protecting the welfare of future generations of animals is achieved firstly by breeders acknowledging the presence of any inherited disorders or exaggerated physical features that may compromise quality of life in their particular breed and in their own animals. These disorders are then effectively prevented by engaging in best practice breeding programs which entail the following:
  - i. *Screening breeding animals for genetic disorders and excluding animals with detrimental physical or temperament characteristics from breeding programs:*
    - The breeder is aware, through education and consultation with veterinarians, geneticists, other responsible breeders and breed associations, of the common genetic disorders and exaggerated features known for that particular breed or mix of breeds.

- The breeder has an understanding of problems associated with breed standards (e.g. requiring exaggerated features) and does not breed to follow these standards where they compromise animal welfare. Breeders should also take active steps to change breed standards that are linked to known welfare problems.
  - Potential breeding animals are screened by a registered veterinarian for health problems (inherited disorders, genetic defects and exaggerated physical features) and behavioural problems that compromise animal welfare (see A6.5).
  - The breeder uses all available, validated screening tests relevant to the breed. For example for canine hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia and DNA tests for progressive retinal atrophy in certain dog breeds.
  - Some screening tests will also identify animals with an ‘unaffected carrier’ status for inherited disorders. This information should be used to inform breeding practices and avoid inherited diseases in offspring by avoiding breeding two carrier animals.
  - 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 (e.g. exaggerated physical features), that animal should be excluded from breeding.
  - The breeder readily supplies the prospective owner with copies of certified veterinary medical reports and the results of all 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.
- ii. *Avoids breeding closely related animals to avoid problems associated with inbreeding*
- The breeder does not allow closely related animals to breed with each other, e.g. first degree relatives (father to daughter, brother to sister) or second degree relatives (grandfather to granddaughter). The breeder aims to arrange matings between pairs that are the least related to reduce the inbreeding coefficient to as close to 0% as possible. Breeding closely related animals increases on average, the incidence of inherited disorders and compromises immune system function which adversely impacts upon the health and welfare of companion animals and can ultimately lead to infertility problems (See A6.6).
- iii. *Avoids breeding for traits that are detrimental to the animal’s welfare or quality of life*
- A good breeder will select for physical and temperament traits that are compatible with a high quality of life for the animal. The breeder does not prioritize appearance above health, welfare and 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 animals to ensure their suitability as companion animals.
- 7 A responsible breeder provides ongoing support and information to the new owner**

- a New owners are provided with information on feeding, socialisation, exercise, registration and identification requirements. Specific information on the need for desexing prior to sexual maturity is provided with all cats and dogs sold.
- b New owners are provided with a full health record for their animals including a vaccination card completed by a registered veterinarian and any medications given prior to purchase and those required in the future (e.g. flea, tick and worming schedule). For dogs and cats, this health record should reference the microchip number of the animal.
- c 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.

#### **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 for various reasons, including problems with health, behaviour, compatibility, or inability of the owner to provide 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 house them at their breeding facility permanently. Breeders must have the capacity and capability to provide a high standard of living (see 2b) and care for returned animals. Returned animals are not euthanased unless it is deemed necessary by a registered veterinarian and in the best interests of the animal based on animal welfare grounds.
- c Information gained from a returned animal or feedback from owners about any health or behavioural related issues should be used to inform breeding, rearing and socialisation practices in the future.

#### **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.

#### **10 A responsible breeder complies with relevant local, state/territory and federal legislation and standards/codes of practice**

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

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**References and information sources**

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- 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>
- VetCompass Australia: <http://sydney.edu.au/vetscience/vetcompass/>