

Reports and Comments

Codes of Practice for the welfare of companion animals in England: dogs, cats and equines. A lesson in devolved decision-making?

In November 2008, the devolved Welsh Regional Assembly published the first Codes of Practice for the welfare of cats, dogs and equines, as called for under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Over a year on, Defra has now published their version of the same Codes for England (the Scottish Parliament still has yet to do so, although they have consulted).

These Codes highlight the differences that can arise between the regions through their devolved legislative powers in the area of animal health and welfare and their consultation processes and it is interesting to compare their solutions to the same task. Whilst both sets of Codes use a framework based upon the Five Freedoms, with sections that give advice on the need for a suitable environment, diet, exhibition of normal behaviour, companionship and health and welfare, the Defra/English Codes are much briefer and to the point and dispense with the more extensive (and at times, arguably contentious) guidance that was contained within the second of the two-part Welsh codes; the Defra dog code runs to 9 pages for example, the two sections of the Welsh to 56.

As might be expected by this discrepancy, the legislative touch for English pet owners is a much lighter one than is experienced by the Welsh. For example, and as previously reported in the Report and Comment on the Welsh Codes, the summary section on 'Environment' in the Dog code requires owners to "make sure your dog has a suitable place to live" by providing it with "a comfortable, dry, draught-free resting area to which it has constant access and where it feels safe" and that it is "kept away from potentially harmful substances". This contrasts with the Defra Code which states that "Your dog needs a safe environment... and protection from hazards". The resting area needs to be "comfortable, clean, dry, quiet" and "draught free", although there is no requirement for constant access nor that this resting area has to be the place where the dog feels safe (although it should have access to such a place). Further, there is no requirement in the Defra Code, unlike the Welsh, that dogs have a specific bed "with no sharp corners or splinters as these may cause injury", nor that any large plants that the dogs have contact with "are in a stable container that cannot be knocked over" or that owners should "clean up after your dog at home using a plastic bag or 'pooper scooper' and to dispose of any faeces in the waste bin, particularly where there are children around". Whether you feel that these omissions are a good or bad thing is likely to depend upon your views on the role of legislation and the common-sense of the public. Certainly, if the devil is in the detail, the Defra Codes seem to be trying to trying to ensure that it is a much-reduced devil.

In the place of Part 2 of the Welsh Codes, the Defra Codes are content to direct owners to other sources of information,

of which the owners' veterinary surgeon is identified as the primary and most important, along with the websites of numerous animal welfare charities and other concerned organisations (something the Welsh Codes do too but which, because of their length, feels more secondary). This former approach clearly requires the legislative body to have faith that the named organisations, such as the Dogs Trust and RSPCA, will be able to fulfil their role as sources of relevant information and that their advice will not conflict. The more prescriptive route taken by the Welsh Codes avoids this issue, but means that the advice in the Codes will need to be more regularly reviewed by the Welsh Assembly to ensure that it stays current and reflects changes in knowledge.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Defra equine Code differs in tone from the cat and dog Codes in that it is slightly lengthier and more similar to the Welsh Code, which itself is closely akin to the long-standing and successful codes that exist for sheep, cattle and other farmed animals — a reflection of the way they are housed and managed perhaps and not on the place they hold in peoples' lives.

It is with interest that we await the publication of the Scottish version of the Codes; will they follow the lead of the Welsh or Defra codes or will they adopt another, third approach? The decision they take will demonstrate which of the style of Codes they prefer and may place pressure on the unfavoured regional style and Codes to be amended to come in line with the others.

The Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Cats, Dogs and Equines (2009). A4, 8 pages (cat), 9 (dog), 25 (equines). Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, London, UK. Copies of these documents are available for download from: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/pets/cruelty/index.htm>

S Wickens

UFAW

Pedigree dog health and welfare part 2. Findings of the Bateson inquiry into dog breeding

With the publication of the Bateson 'Independent Inquiry into Dog Breeding', the likely future for dog breeding in the UK becomes clearer. This report, by Professor Sir Patrick Bateson FRS, follows close on the heels of that of The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare's report into the health and welfare issues surrounding the breeding of pedigree dogs, which was published in November 2009 (and which was the subject of a Report and Comment in *Animal Welfare* 20:1). Taken together, these complimentary reports challenge the current *status quo* of The Kennel Club's control and regulation of the breeding of pedigree (and other) dogs in the UK and raise the distinct possibility that, in line with their key recommendations, it passes instead to a non-statutory Advisory Council on Dog Breeding. The Bateson report advises that the role of this Council should be "to develop evidence-based breeding strategies that address the issues of poor conformation, inherited disease and inbreeding, as appropriate to the

specific breed, and to provide advice on the priorities for research and development in this area". What makes the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Bateson report more likely than is sometimes the case, is that the Bateson inquiry was commissioned by The Kennel Club itself, along with the UK charity, Dogs Trust.

The findings and views in the report are based on the responses received to an initial call for evidence in February 2009 and subsequent interviews that took place with a range of interested individuals and organisations that included politicians, civil and public servants, scientists, veterinary surgeons, dog breeders, and representatives of animal care charities.

The report starts with chapters considering issues surrounding the domestication of the dog, assessment of animal welfare and genetics and inbreeding before detailing the welfare costs of dog breeding and making recommendations as to the way forward. In the latter sections, Bateson is keen to acknowledge the work that has taken place to address issues of dog breeding. Examples include the work carried out in gathering data on the range and prevalence of different inherited diseases in breeds by the Royal Veterinary College, The Kennel Club's work to educate and better train judges to recognise and reward good health and fitness of dogs to behave normally, its collaboration with the Animal Health Trust to develop a Mate Select Facility by which breeders can find the most appropriate mate for a dam and its Accredited Breeders Scheme which seeks to encourage the breeding of healthy puppies. However, even when doing so, he also highlights where improvements must occur. For example, he calls for greater public funding for research into companion animals and their health and welfare and to support the gathering of information on disease prevalence from a broad spectrum of veterinary surgeries, university veterinary hospitals and other major clinical centres. Similarly, he feels that the KC Accredited Breeders Scheme does not yet fully deliver on its assurance of good welfare standards for both parents and litters and lists 10 conditions which he sees must be met as a minimum for any such scheme to be judged as adequate. These include that all pre-mating tests for inherited disease appropriate to the breed or breeds are undertaken on both parents, that no mating takes place if the tests indicate that it would be inadvisable because it is likely to produce welfare problems in the offspring and/or is inadvisable in the context of a relevant breeding strategy; that every puppy is identified by microchip prior to sale and that all pre-sale tests on the puppy, which are appropriate to the breed, have been carried out. Whilst Bateson expresses the hope that The Kennel Club will be able to ensure that these and the other conditions become part of their Accredited Breeders Scheme, he warns that if intransigence on the part of breeders means they are not, that a new scheme incorporating these should be implemented through the Advisory Council on Dog Breeding. He also calls for a revision of Breed Standards to encourage the selection for morphologies that will improve the welfare status of breeds.

It is not only The Kennel Club and breeders that come in for critical attention. Bateson also focuses on veterinary surgeons, the public and existing legislation and calls for action here too. He identifies the dilemma that faces vets who derive income from treating health problems caused by heritable conditions and whose duty is also to advise against the breeding of increased numbers of dogs with these conditions. He encourages vets to become more active in the screening of dogs and in the collection of anonymised data on the prevalence of heritable conditions from veterinary surgeries and to become more involved in enforcement of dog breeding and sales legislation. He calls for the public to give more thought to the acquisition of a dog and be more selective in who they purchase it from and the questions they ask whilst doing so. Better education of the public is identified as necessary for these goals to be achieved. Finally, he notes that a national system of microchipping all dogs would assist Local Authorities (LA) with the enforcement of existing legislation. He indicates that this, along with a nationwide list of all LA-registered dog breeders, would allow data to be gathered on the number of puppies bred and sold each year and would make it much easier to trace animals back to the owner and breeder.

The Kennel Club was swift to respond to the Bateson report, broadly welcoming it and its recommendations and pointing to all the ways it is and/or intends to meet these (<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/item/2896/23/5/3>). As part of these, it indicates that it will now arrange a meeting with all relevant parties to discuss the detail of Professor Bateson's report along with the issues raised in the APGAW and RSPCA reports into dog breeding. In addition, it has announced the formation of a new Dog Health Group to replace the former KC Breed Health and Welfare Strategy Group. This new group has a broader remit and additional independent experts, including canine and human geneticists, veterinary surgeons and an epidemiologist and is clearly an attempt to counter the need for an independent Advisory Council set up along the lines recommended by Bateson.

NB: The Kennel Club response to the APGAW report can be found at: <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/item/2768/23/5/3>.

Independent Inquiry into Dog Breeding (January 2010). P Bateson, University of Cambridge. A4, 69 pages. Available to be downloaded from <http://www.dogbreedinginquiry.com>

S Wickens

UFAW

Whither the strategy for animal health and welfare in England? The parting thoughts of the England Implementation Group

This third and, with its dissolution, final report of the England Implementation Group (EIG) reviews the progress that has been made in the five years since the publication in 2004 of the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy for Great Britain (AHWS) and the challenges that remain. The report acknowledges that "There are few good indicators of what