

Policy Position: Puppy Farming

Introduction

Puppy farming involves the rearing and sale of puppies where the major concern is for profit with limited regard for the health and welfare of either the breeding dogs or the puppies. Puppy farms frequently operate on farm premises (e.g. livestock farms) but also occur in domestic and other locations. Puppy farms can be of any scale but frequently keep many tens to hundreds of breeding animals and rear a wide variety of breeds. A significant proportion of puppies supplied in the United Kingdom each year, likely of the order of many tens of thousands, are produced on puppy farms. These farms may either be in the UK itself, or increasingly outside of the UK. While some local authorities do enforce licensing of breeding premises, sadly this is often no guarantee of high (or even acceptable) welfare standards. Many puppies may be imported which have been reared on puppy farms (for example in Ireland or Eastern Europe) where welfare standards are totally outside the control of the UK authorities and can be very poor indeed.

Issues

Puppy farm conditions are often characterised by barren environments, lack of exercise and stimulation for breeding dogs kept, lack of proper socialisation of puppies, poor nutrition and minimal veterinary care. Puppies are often sold on through third parties such as dealers and pet shops. Puppy farm puppies are often advertised through the internet or newspaper advertisements with misleading representation of their breeding background. Puppy farms seldom allow visitors and often deny key expectations of purchasers, such as to see a puppy with its mother.

Puppy farms rarely take adequate care over selection of breeding parents and are unlikely to use relevant tests of genetic health, or to take care to avoid exacerbating welfare problems associated with poor conformation. Such

farms frequently use a small number of stud dogs repetitively and may breed from closely-related breeding pairs that lead to harms associated with in-breeding. Poor hygiene conditions, lack of adequate care of the breeding bitch, and failure to respond to illness and disease, mean that puppies produced may frequently suffer infectious disease before or after their sale. Purchasers of puppy farm puppies may often find that they experience distress as a result of illness of the dog, and significant on-going veterinary costs. Kennel Club 'registration' of a puppy is not a guarantee that it has not been reared on a puppy farm.

The poor standards of puppy farms mean that significant costs are imposed on society. These include the costs of veterinary care for purchasers and their emotional distress; increased risk of dogs being given up because of behavioural problems with increased risk of early euthanasia; increased costs imposed on local authorities for impounding of stray and abandoned animals; increased risk of aggression and behavioural problems creating increased medical and hospitalisation costs.

The current legislative framework for regulation of dog breeders is inadequate with key statutes such as the Breeding of Dogs Act, 1973 and the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act, 1999 failing to specify appropriate minimum standards. There is a persistent failure of many authorities to ensure that the further requirements of the Animal Welfare Act, 2006 are met before allowing a breeding licence to be awarded.

DBRG Position

DBRG is opposed to the sale of puppies through third parties including pet shops as these represent a key vehicle for the sale of puppies from puppy farms. While model licensing conditions for breeding premises are essential, licensing conditions for pet shops can never prevent the intrinsic harms associated with the process of sale through them.

DBRG regards all those who choose to breed dogs as having responsibility for the health (including genetic health), welfare and temperament of the puppies they produce. They should also be responsible for finding suitable owners who will take care of their dog for the whole of its life and for providing appropriate information and support for purchasers. None of these are true of puppy farmers and DBRG emphasises that irresponsible dog breeding and the

practice of puppy farming must be tackled urgently with maximum public awareness raised of these practices. Increased public education is essential.

Recommendations

- Review of the legislative framework to provide clear and adequate welfare standards consistent with good practice and current understanding
- Statutory guidance to local authorities consistent with the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act, 2006
- Powers for licence revocation and suspension by local authorities
- Adequate penalties for enforcement
- Adequate resourcing for local authorities for dog breeding licensing and enforcement
- Appropriate qualification and training of local authority officers
- Banning the sale of puppies through third parties
- Education of potential puppy buyers regarding best sourcing of puppies

Published December 2016