

BVA policy position on extreme conformation – Executive Summary

Introduction

Extremes of conformation in animals can be defined as when an animal's body shape, structure or appearance has the potential to result in negative impacts on their health and welfare (see crossspecies examples at Appendix 1). Breeding decisions across companion and production animals should be taken with the aim of conferring healthy or healthier conformational traits, being mindful of the potential health and welfare impact of selection for specific or desirable structural features.

Society as a whole, including the veterinary professions, owners and keepers, breeders, registering bodies, breed clubs and societies, academics, animal charities and those with a commercial interest in the use of animals and their images, have a social and moral responsibility to work together towards:

- ensuring healthier future generations of animals that currently experience extreme conformation
- reducing the negative health and welfare impacts of extreme conformation.
- increasing awareness of the health and welfare issues associated with extreme conformation across different species.
- encouraging research in order to better understand and address the prevalence of, and trends in, conformation-related ill-health.
- encouraging research in order to better understand and address the prevalence of the welfare impacts resulting from extreme conformation.
- the development of objective, robust measures to contribute to the assessment of problematic conformation.

BVA does however recognise that it may be necessary to select animals with specific conformational traits for scientific purposes in line with the [Animals \(Scientific Procedures\) Act 1986](#).

Recommendations

Below BVA sets out 10 key recommendations for stakeholders across animal health and welfare, including the veterinary professions, registering bodies, breeders, owners and keepers and marketers and advertisers to ensure healthier future generations of animals. Our specific recommendations are:

Recommendation 1: BVA encourages all veterinary surgeons to participate in reporting schemes regarding surgery to correct health and welfare problems relating to conformation where these exist.

Recommendation 2: BVA encourages veterinary surgeons to advise keepers not to breed from companion or production animals that have required a caesarean section due to birthing difficulties that are a result of extreme conformation.

Recommendation 3: In companion animals, neutering should be encouraged as a means of preventing the perpetuation of extremes of conformation.

Recommendation 4: Animals showing extremes of conformation that negatively affect their health and welfare should not be used for breeding.

Recommendation 5: Breed Standards for animals with extreme conformation should be reviewed according to evidence and be clear in their definitions of healthy conformations. This could be achieved using diagrams, quantitative ratios and conformational limits¹²³⁴ and developed in consultation with expert veterinary input. Show judges across sectors and species areas eg. dog shows, agricultural shows etc. have a role in ensuring that only animals that demonstrate healthy conformation are placed, encouraging improvements to breed health and incentivising the selection of healthy parents as part of the breeding process.

Recommendation 6: BVA would welcome the development of breed-specific objective assessment measurements, ratios or indices to contribute to the assessment of problematic extreme conformations leading to negative health and welfare impacts.

Recommendation 7: Breeders and keepers should carefully consider the health and welfare problems associated with the extreme conformation of certain breed-types across companion and production animals. Breeders should comply with current animal welfare legislation when undertaking breeding decisions and consult with a veterinary surgeon to enable informed decisions as to whether certain animals can be responsibly bred to confer healthy conformational traits.

Recommendation 8: Prospective owners and keepers should carefully consider the health and welfare problems associated with certain breed-types and speak to their veterinary surgeon to obtain advice before purchasing animals.

Recommendation 9: The use of images or videos of animals with extreme conformation in advertising and marketing materials should be avoided so as to encourage responsible ownership and avoid the normalisation of poor health amongst these animals. We would encourage veterinary practices, marketers and designers to consult the BVA Good practice guidance for the responsible use of pet animals in advertising before commissioning and using animals in marketing materials or consult with their local vet.

Recommendation 10: Research should be carried out to better understand the social influences that drive breed demand in order to develop targeted educational strategies that will influence purchasing behaviours and breeding/production drivers.

Last updated November 2018.

1 Liu NC, Troconis EL, Kalmar L, Price DJ, Wright HE, Adams VJ, Sargan DR, Ladlow JF. Conformational risk factors of brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome (BOAS) in pugs, French bulldogs, and bulldogs. PLoS One. 2017 Aug 1;12(8):e0181928.

2 Liu NC, Oechtering GU, Adams VJ, Kalmar L, Sargan DR, Ladlow JF. (2017) Outcomes and prognostic factors of surgical treatments for brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome in 3 breeds. Vet Surg. 2017 Feb;46(2):271-280

3 Liu NC, Sargan DR, Adams VJ, Ladlow JF. (2015) Characterisation of Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome in French Bulldogs Using Whole-Body Barometric Plethysmography. PLoS One. Jun 16;10(6):e0130741.

4 Bateson, P. 2010. Independent inquiry into dog breeding. Cambridge: University of Cambridge.