Policy position: puppy farming

We believe that irresponsible dog breeding and the practice of puppy farming must be tackled as quickly as possible.

Puppy farming has a detrimental effect on the health and welfare of bitches and their litters, and too often veterinary surgeons see the devastating consequences of poor breeding practices which can lead to suffering for both the animals and their owners. Bitches are often kept in small pens without natural light or contact with other dogs, and produce multiple litters in a year. This practice facilitates the spread of infectious diseases and frequently results in behavioural problems, both in the bitches and in their pups.

Anyone breeding dogs as a business and/or breeding more than four litters a year, in England, Wales and Scotland, is currently bound by the Breeding of Dogs Acts 1973 and 1991 and the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999. Local authorities must ensure that regular inspections are carried out by people with the requisite veterinary and welfare expertise to ensure that the regulations are complied with. These regulations are subject to change and it is the responsibility of breeders to ensure they keep up to date with current legislation.

The Puppy Contract

The veterinary profession plays an important role in promoting responsible pet ownership and providing advice to prospective dog owners on what to look for when buying a puppy.

Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF) and RSPCA have produced a puppy contract and information pack to empower a member of the public to make an informed choice about the individual puppy they are considering buying.

We encourage veterinary practices to make the contract and information pack available to clients. They recommend that prospective buyers should always see any puppy with its mother and ensure records are available of the puppy’s vaccinations, worming and flea treatment as well as other veterinary treatment.
Breeding licensing legislation

We have called on governments and local authorities to conduct a broad review of existing breeding licensing legislation to ensure it is fit for purpose. We supported the conclusion of Professor Bateson’s report on dog breeding that current legislation could be reviewed and re-presented as regulations under the Animal Welfare Acts, and that Better Regulation should not be used as an excuse to indefinitely delay such a review.

We were represented on the Welsh Government’s Task and Finish group which reviewed existing legislation and reported in July 2010. The Welsh Government then consulted on a new set of proposed regulations based on this report, and the Department for Rural Development in Northern Ireland has done the same. We will continue to lobby for the English and Scottish governments to review their legislation on dog breeding.