

From the

COMPANION ANIMAL WELFARE COUNCIL (CAWC)

28th May 2008

Not for publication before 14:00 Thursday 29th May 2008

Genetic disease, breeding and welfare of companion animals

Two years after the publication of its first Report on this subject, CAWC held a workshop at the House of Lords on 29th April to review and look in more detail at the sorts of measures that are being undertaken to tackle genetic diseases that can compromise the welfare of companion animals.

The focus of the workshop was the condition of syringomyelia in the Cavalier King Charles spaniel. This disease is caused by a hereditary mismatch of brain and skull size, that can occur in these and some other toy breeds, and that can cause chronic and sometimes severe pain. It was hoped that focusing on this example, would have two benefits. First, in identifying further steps that can be taken to tackle this specific problem. Second, that review of the strategies being used to tackle syringomyelia, and the roles of the various players involved, may be helpful in highlighting important principles and approaches relevant to tackling genetic welfare problems in companion animals in general.

Among those attending the workshop were veterinarians, geneticists, representatives of the national and regional breed clubs, the Kennel Club, breeders and owners. Recent research findings were discussed and various actions were proposed including:

- There should be further debate about the relative merits of each of the three possible approaches to tackling these kinds of welfare problems. These are: breeding to reduce prevalence or eliminate within the breed, outbreeding (crossing with other breeds) to reduce prevalence or eliminate, or ceasing to breed at all from potential carriers;
- breed clubs and the Kennel Club should work more closely together further to find ways to make more health and welfare information available;
- scientists studying the epidemiology and genetics of syringomyelia in CKCS should get together with breed club representatives, facilitated by the Kennel Club, to devise a scheme for collection of data on the epidemiology of the disease (including systems for assessing MRI results), for use in pursuit of its control or elimination.

CAWC will be exploring ways to facilitate the first of these and looks forward to hearing of timescales for and progress with the other two initiatives and also of progress with other initiatives outlined at the workshop, including: development of genetic tests, development of

web-based mate-selection advice, and initiatives for education and provision of better information on health and welfare for prospective owners.

Copies of the Report of the Workshop are available from:

CAWC Secretariat
The Dene
Old North Road
Bourn
Cambridge CB23 7TZ

Or as listed at CAWC website

www.cawc.org.uk

email: cawc@cawc.freeserve.co.uk

Regrettably, due to web site reconstruction, the report will not be available on line.

-ENDS-

Media contacts:

Dr James Kirkwood, Deputy Chairman of CAWC and Chair of the Breeding and Welfare Working Group. Tel: 01582-831818, email kirkwood@ufaw.org.uk

Lord Soulsby of Swaffham Prior, Chairman of CAWC. Tel: xxxxx email xxxxxxxxx

Note to Editors:

The Companion Animal Welfare Council (www.cawc.org.uk) was founded in 1999 to provide independent advice and to inform public debate on matters relating to the welfare of companion animals. It pursues its objectives through undertaking independent and objective studies of companion animal welfare issues, identifying where further action is required, and preparing and publishing reports thereon. The Council is open to requests for objective views, advice and the carrying out of independent studies on issues concerned with the welfare of companion animals. CAWC is funded by the Welfare Fund for Companion Animals (registered charity No 107058)