



## **The Pre 1987 British Bulldog Standard – why did the ANKC Amend it?**

Recently there has been a great deal of comment on Facebook, regarding the decision by the ANKC to amend the British Bulldog Breed Standard, much has been made of what was done, without any mention of why it was done, the ANKC Directors believe that both sides of the story need to be told.

Until 1992, it was ANKC policy to adopt only The Kennel Club (England) Standards. Around 1987, the Kennel Club (England) urged all English Breed Clubs to revise their Standards, this was completed around 1994.

Due to Breed Clubs and breeders/owners in Australia disagreeing with many of the revised Standards, the ANKC agreed to allow Breed Clubs and/or owners, where there were no breed clubs, to choose between the Pre-1987 Standard, the revised Kennel Club Standard, the FCI Standard or the Country of Origin/Development Standard. The process to choose one of the above standards, the Breed Clubs, and owners where there were no breed clubs were required to conduct a survey of all registered owners of each breed, these results were then ratified at the May 1998 ANKC Conference, arising from the surveys a number of breeds, including the British Bulldog opted to retain the Pre 1987 Standard.

In the UK in 2008 the BBC aired a documentary “Pedigree Dogs Exposed”, it was a hard hitting expose of congenital defects in pedigree dogs, some of which were allegedly caused by poor breeding practices associated with exaggerations required in Breed Standards, one of the outcomes of the documentary was that during 2009 the Kennel Club held a comprehensive review, conducted in conjunction with a large body of experts, including vets, to ensure that they encouraged the breeding of healthy dogs. In this review every Breed Standard was rewritten to make it explicitly clear that the process of exaggerating features because they are seen to look good, when this at the expense of the dog's health, was not in any way acceptable.

Following the UK review, a recommendation from the ANKC Breed Standards Committee, that the ANKC cancel the current ANKC Policy of allowing breeds to adopt the Pre 1897 Kennel Club (England) Standards, and for the ANKC to adopt the current standard from the Kennel Club (England) or from the Country of Origin/Development, was endorsed by the Delegates to the October 2009 Conference, however after submissions from Breed Councils, the 2010 Conference resolved that no action be taken to implement the action from the 2009 Conference in relation to the Pre 1987 Breed Standard.

In 2009, "Pedigree Dogs Exposed" was broadcast in Australia as part of the ABC "Catalyst" Program, thanks to pre-work by the ANKC with the AVA and RSPCA, who were provided with information on health testing programs adopted by a large number of breeds, the impact was not as great as it had been in the UK, however a focus in the "Catalyst" program was on the British Bulldog, in particular the words in the Standard that required the head to be strikingly massive and large in proportion to the dog's size, and the skull to be very large - the larger the better, and that most British Bulldog Bitches were unable to whelp naturally due to the size of puppies heads. This was the start of concerted efforts by parties such as, the RSPCA, the AVA and the ABC the vehicle for prosecuting the case attacking brachycephalic breeders, without input from the National British Bulldog Breed Council (NBBC) , ANKC found great difficulty in counteracting the criticism of over exaggeration in the breed standard, when engaging with aggressive interviewers who were aware of the changes to the standard made by the Kennel Club (UK), and who could not understand why Australian British Bulldog Breeders would not follow the actions of the country that was considered the home of the British Bulldog and where it was developed.

In a follow up article to "Pedigree Dogs Exposed" in the Sydney Morning Herald in December 2009, Assoc Professor Paul McGreevy from Sydney University commented that with many judges and breeders, asking them to change breed standards is like asking them to rob a granny.

From this time forward the ANKC was continually under attack, by the AVA, RSPCA, ABC and Academics from the Faculty of Veterinary Science at Sydney University, and individual Veterinarians. The main objective of these campaigns was to get ANKC to modify words contained in the British Bulldog Breed Standard head and skull description, such as "the head strikingly massive and large in proportion to the dog's size, the face extremely short, the skull should be very large - the larger the better".

The crusade against breed standard exaggerations was ramped up in 2016, with the Australia wide release of the "Love is Blind" video, promoted as an animal health and welfare campaign between the Australian Veterinary Association and the RSPCA, to raise awareness of the problems caused by exaggerated physical features, such as brachycephaly, short limbs and excessive skin wrinkling, and calling for a fundamental shift in the way purebred dogs are selected and bred in Australia.

After the “Love is Blind Campaign”, the call for change in breed standards was joined by Academics from Sydney University Veterinary Science Faculty, Professors Nicholas and McGreevy who challenged ANKC to respond to such media statements as:

“In some cases, traits that are best regarded as defects, have actually been included in breed standards, e.g. brachycephaly in the British Bulldog. Breeders compete with one another to see how well they can produce phenotypes that conform to a written standard, including traits that have, at best, questionable welfare benefits. The British Bulldog is required to have a curved ‘roach’ back, it is therefore not surprising that British Bulldogs are sometimes born with twisted spines, i.e. hemivertebrae. For the British Bulldog, the skull should be very large, the larger the better’ (Pre-1987 Kennel Club, London). This is a breed in which, large foetal head size commonly leads to dystocia (difficulties in birthing)”.

Professor Nicholas also wrote:

“Of course, many of the members and governance personnel of Kennel Clubs are pedigree dog breeders. It is right therefore to pause and consider the extent to which welfare may have become subordinated to certain breed practices. It is not difficult to see how, after generations of owners have spent years focusing on the morphology of their dogs, some find it hard to see the proverbial wood for the trees. Breed standards can easily become entrenched in the minds of breeders, buyers and fanciers, as well as those (often interested parties) who are involved in the judging (and so promotion) of a breed and its ‘established’ characteristics”.

Until 2014 the ANKC had been meeting, on a regular basis, with the RSPCA National Office regarding health issues in pedigree dogs, despite being presented with overwhelming evidence, that many breeds had introduced health screening programs to reduce the incidence of known inherited health conditions, the RSPCA would not back away from their position that ANKC should remove breeding exaggerations required in Breed Standards, including of course the British Bulldog, as this issue dominated every meeting and, as ANKC was unable to provide a logical answer as to why British Bulldog Breeders would not agree to Standard changes, we terminated the meetings.

Faced with continuing criticism for indecision in addressing exaggerations in the British Bulldog Standard, and with no positive information to address the adverse commentary, the ANKC Directors felt that they had no alternative but to take action to resolve the situation.

Subsequently, the ANKC wrote to the NBBC suggesting changes to modify the exaggerations in the head and skull description, the suggestions were rejected, later ANKC Directors were informed, by some British Bulldog owners, that they had not been consulted on the proposed changes to the head description.

In December 2017 the Board wrote to the NBBC, expressing their disappointment at the decision not to endorse the head changes, and as a result asked them to provide a rationale, as to why, they should be allowed to retain the Pre-1987 Standard with the head and skull exaggerations that were the cause of continuing censure, in April 2018 the Council replied with a series of statements, which the Board did not consider provided a rationale that could support the retention of the Pre 1987 Standard, and satisfactorily address the ani-brachycephalic campaigns.

In December 2018, the NBBC wrote to the ANKC with a proposal for a National Health Scheme, the ANKC Health and Wellbeing Committee considered that although the proposal was a promising start to control health issues with the British Bulldog, it did not address the concerns that had been raised in regard to the exaggerated head and skull descriptions, but agreed that if the NBBC wished to proceed to implement this scheme, they should do so under their own umbrella. In view of this initiative, the Board resolved to delay any further action on Standard alterations until the scheme was in progress.

At the October 2019 ANKC Board meeting, it was reported to the Directors, that the proposed National Health Scheme had not gone ahead, coupled with the Boards determination that the statements made by the NBBC, in April 2018 for retaining the Pre-1987 Standard, did not answer the December 2017 request for a rationale, it was resolved to give the NBBC a choice of adopting the Kennel Club (UK) current breed standard or the amended Pre 1987 breed standard, as proposed by the ANKC Board of Directors.

At the February 2020 ANKC Board Meeting, after reviewing the response from the NBBC, the Directors agreed, that the Council had still not addressed whether they wanted to adopt the Kennel Club (UK) current breed standard or the proposed amended Pre 1987 standard, and resolved to implement the amended Pre 1987 standard.

The NBBC have written to all Breed Councils seeking support for an approach to the ANKC to rescind the decision, as the NBBC have indicated that they are seeking legal advice, ANKC will only comment on why the amendments were made, and wish to restate that the changes were made solely due to health concerns within the breed, and to meet its obligation under ANKC Objective (e) “to promote the health and welfare of Canis Familiaris”, and to demonstrate, that the ANKC Ltd has taken seriously, the global commentary on health problems associated with the exaggerated requirements in the Pre 1987 British Bulldog Standard.

It is now 30 years, since the NBBC opted to retain that Standard rather than adopt the revised Kennel Club Standard, over those years there have been huge advances in research into morphological exaggerations in canines, and the British Bulldog has been a main focus of these studies, the consensus of the scientists is, that problems in the British Bulldog are directly related to the standard for the breed, and this has been adopted as the mantra for those who seek to alter or even ban the breed.

In coming to its decision, the Board took into consideration, that Veterinary research has identified that the shorter the face the more changes occur within the nasal cavity with septal deviations, stenosis within the nasal cavity as well as just the nares, elongation of the soft palate .... to mention the main ones, added to that within the British Bulldog is a narrowing of the trachea that is seen, and can considerably affect breathing.

The width of the neck can be fairly directly linked to the size of the head, so asking for a relatively large head, rather than one that is as large as possible, is common sense and moving in the right direction.

ANKC has invited the NBBC to work with the ANKC Health and Wellbeing Committee to institute health programs that will demonstrate that Australian Breeders are working to improve the health of the British Bulldog, who remains hugely popular, as a family companion for his great character and loyalty, the fact that the breed is so popular makes it all the more important that we find ways to improve and protect its health as a priority.

ANKC want to see the breed prosper and develop, rather than seeing it banned in its entirety, which is still on the global agenda of many Veterinarians and Animal Rights Organisations who masquerade as Animal Welfare Societies.

In conclusion, after 12 years of attempting to defend the indefensible exaggerations in the Pre 1987 British Bulldog Standard, and 3 years of unproductive consultations with the National British Bulldog Council, to ensure improvement in the health and the future of the British Bulldog in Australia, the ANKC Board of Directors had no alternative but to modify the exaggerations in the Pre 1987 Standard.

Tracey Barry  
Administrator