

HEALTH & WELFARE FACT SHEET:

Recognised breeders of pedigree dogs.

The Australian National Kennel Council (ANKC) and its Member (State Canine Control) Bodies believe that breeding programs should only be undertaken responsibly and for the purpose of improving the breed. Due consideration must be given to recognised hereditary problems in any breeding program and any resulting puppies should only be placed in homes where the owners are committed to responsible dog ownership.

In Australia to become recognised as a breeder of pedigree dogs you must first be a member of a State Canine Control body such as Dogs ACT. In the Australian Capital Territory you must have at least 12 months continual financial membership and have passed an exam before you are granted a breeders prefix.

This means you have to prove your knowledge of your breed, of breeding and animal husbandry and your understanding of ethical breeding practices, which must comply with the "Code of Ethics", "Aims and Objectives" and "Rules and Regulations" of that State Canine Control body. Within these codes are health and welfare considerations which are quite extensive, including adequate maturity for a first litter, a maximum number of litters that can be bred from a bitch and that there must be adequate time to recover between litters.

It is important that any welfare body, veterinarian, journalist or other researcher who seeks further information on the program, should recognise that not all pure breed dogs come under the control of the Australian National Kennel Council.

A great number of breeders choose not to be members of the affiliate bodies of the ANKC so that they are not bound by any codes of ethics or breeding regulations, and are not accountable to any regulatory body in respect of health and welfare. Instead they piggy back of the good work of the affiliate bodies without any constructive or financial contribution to the health and welfare issues of the dogs they breed.

Breeders can be grouped under four main headings.

- Firstly, the occasional breeder, who now and again breeds a litter for their friends or to keep as an additional pet in the family.
- Secondly there is a group that produces large numbers of puppies merely as a means of making a profit, often for export to Asian markets. The greatest health problems are likely to be found in puppies produced by these commercial breeders, who choose not be members of ANKC Affiliate Bodies, and are not required to address health issues.
- Thirdly are breeders who service the demand for Designer Dogs. Appearing on the Kerri-Anne Kennerley Show in February 2007, Don Burke estimated

that over 70,000 Designer Dogs had been bred the previous year, over the same period the ANKC registered 61,517 puppies.

- Fourthly and the most important are the breeders who support dog shows and competitions and breed mainly to improve their stock for show or competitive events.

To expect the impetus, the will or the funding of canine health initiatives to come from the first three groups is just not realistic. So it is the dedicated breeders who support shows and competitions and are members of ANKC Affiliates who have been, and are going to be, the mainstay of breed improvements.

We are opposed to the production of dogs by those people who breed without regard for the quality of the animals that they produce and without accepting responsibility for placing the dogs only in homes where the owners understand, and are prepared to undertake a commitment to, responsible ownership.

We endorse strong enforcement of the laws governing commercial breeders and traffickers in dogs and, where necessary, the strengthening of the laws themselves.

Health problems and genetic diseases are not unique to purebred dogs.

Like humans as we live longer, breeds of dogs are also living longer which means maintaining their health and welfare is even more important. This is why ethical registered purebred dog breeders are spending literally thousands of dollars to test their dogs and screen for genetic diseases.

Our dogs have registered pedigrees and we are able to keep track of which lines carry genetic diseases and eliminate them from our breeding programs. Those breeders of crossbred dogs can not provide such guarantees, crossing two unrelated dog breeds doesn't magically create dogs with perfect health. They don't know the parentage of their dogs and they don't health test, which in some cases produces extremely unhealthy dogs.

There have been many cases of the cleverly marketed 'designer' crossbred dogs (sold anonymously through the print media or subject to impulse buying through pet shops), which are later found crippled with conditions such as hip dysplasia for example. The fact is purebred breeders are testing for these conditions and backyard breeders of these crossbred dogs are not.

Health testing of breeding stock.

Comparatively, pedigree dogs are healthier than the human population which suffers from some 40,000 different types of diseases compared to about 400 in the dog population.

Around 90 per cent of pedigree dogs will not suffer from health problems that could have had a detrimental effect on their quality of life; and that figure is improving thanks to advances in science and the introduction of Disease Surveillance Programs.

In the past, recent concerns and the way we used science, was to keep our dogs alive in the face of some horrific diseases (such as parvovirus). These issues have been alleviated to a certain extent by the advent of safe vaccines and modern drugs, and we now have better science, better resources and better education options.

We now have access to DNA tests which we never had in the past, and the ability to use scoring systems with X-ray and ultrasounds for example, which can be used to identify potential problems so they can be eliminated from breeding programs. Today's registered breeders are using these tools to ensure they don't compromise on health in order to achieve other goals in their breeding programs.

Guaranteeing the future of purebred dogs.

It makes no sense for us to compromise on genetic health as we remain responsible for the dog for its entire life and unlike breeders of cross bred dogs we work with future generations in our breeding programs. We put everything we have into ensuring that we don't sacrifice the health of our dogs or their breeds in the pursuit of a ribbon; instead, it is a passion, an honour, a labour of love and a huge lifelong commitment.

Australian registered dog breeders via their controlling State and National bodies donate hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to research into dog diseases and DNA test development. Individual breeders contribute to research by donating samples and funds and the results of this research are not solely for the benefit of purebred dogs, but for all dogs.

What welfare organisation can match that?

Since the introduction of breed specific and disease specific DNA tests, many breeders use these facilities and as more tests become available more breeders will be able to screen prior to breeding. This means a number of health issues are being worked on and many breeds already have to meet certain health criteria before a litter can be registered.

The bottom line is that for good purebred breeders, raising the best dogs they can, not only for now but planning for the future of their breed, involves much more than any business could ever do.

Cross bred dogs outnumber pure bred dogs.

There are far more crossbred dogs in shelters and pounds all over Australia than there are purebred dogs. Why? They did not meet their owners' expectations and therefore did not suit their lifestyle.

When you buy a purebred dog from a registered breeder who breeds for health and for temperament, you know exactly what you are getting. You are also choosing the specific breed of dog that will fit with your family's lifestyle and you know exactly how it is going to turn out.

We know our breeds, we know the sorts of owners they are suited to and we are able to advise people on what they can expect from our breed. The same cannot be said for a crossbreed with which it is impossible to predict the characteristics it inherited from either parent.

The crossbreeds are much less likely to have predictable temperaments and to fit in with a family's lifestyle, more likely to be bred in poor conditions, with no testing for genetic issues and are more likely to end up dumped without a breeder for a safety net.

Disease Surveillance Programs

The ANKC has entered into partnership with the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) in two major Disease Surveillance Programs, Canine Hip & Elbow Dysplasia Scheme (CHEDS) and Australian Canine Eye Scheme (ACES). The results from these schemes have enabled breeders to select sound breeding stock.

After wide consultation with breeders the ANKC has introduced a number of Litter Registration Limitations (LRL's). For example in Golden Retrievers, Labradors, German Shepherds and Rottweiler's, ANKC Member Bodies will not register any litters where the sire and dam have not been screened for Hip Dysplasia. Since the introduction of LRL's in the early 2000's there has been a demonstrable lowering of the mean score for these breeds.

Other breed clubs are currently in the process of instituting LRL's for example Irish Setters-CLAD and Bedlington Terriers-Copper Toxicosis. Other breed clubs are introducing DNA testing requirements for PRA, CL in Border Collies etc. With the growth of DNA disease testing, control schemes are now common place and are helping breeders produce sound, healthy puppies.

For example the German Shepherd Dog Council of Australia was the first GSD organisation in the world to implement an elbow grading scheme.

Research Support

Australian Pedigree Dog Breeders, who are members of ANKC Affiliated Bodies, fund the Canine Research Foundation with an allocation of one dollar from each puppy registration fee. Over half a million dollars has been granted to University Veterinary Researchers.

In addition The Canine Control Council Queensland (CCCQ) funds research in conjunction with the University of Queensland. Dogs NSW fund research in conjunction with the Uni of Sydney. There are many Pedigree Dog Clubs and Societies around Australia providing additional funding for research into diseases affecting their breeds.

Details of the State Canine Control bodies affiliated with the ANKC are listed on the ANKC web site - www.ankc.org.au