

CONTROVERSIAL BREED CHARACTERISTICS, SELECTION PROGRAMMES, CROSS-BREEDING

A statement from Peter Friedrich
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The following short clarifications are intended as a supplement to the articles „Zehn Dilemmata brachycephaler Hunderassen“ and „Brachycephalic Dog Breeds, an update in June 2020“. They also set out the author’s legal view on selected regulations of the Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI).

According to the FCI regulations, which are binding for its members, both breed standards and fundamental phenotypic characteristics of dog breeds can only be changed if the Kennel Club in the country of origin of the breed and the FCI agree. If a kennel club were to ignore these conditions, it would be threatened with sanctions. As will be shown, this does not mean that the populations concerned must remain as they are, but legal aspects must be taken into account when positively influencing them.

The following considerations are based on the assumption that an existing dog breed has serious signs that (1.) it has growing health and reproductive fitness problems (e.g. shortness of breath), that (2.) there is a genetic predisposition to these problems and that (3.) complex morphological characteristics play a role which can be understood as a physical risk disposition (e.g. very short round heads). What can happen now, and above all, what should happen now?

One potential solution is a scientifically based breeding programme based on a thorough evaluation phase, which includes a fitness test and a physical examination. The more thorough the fitness test and physical examination, the greater the chance that this approach will be successful and the greater will be the likelihood of a positive response from dog lovers and experts. Following this strategy only dogs of the still closed population that pass the fitness test and meet minimum criteria for the physical examination, can be used for breeding. One of the greatest advantages of this approach is that friends of a breed who

are convinced that the population is in good condition can be given the opportunity to prove that their assumption is correct. If this proof can be provided, everything is in order. If the assumption turns out to be incorrect and considerable problems arise, it may be possible to rehabilitate the breed with the help of the selection programme without having to make significant changes to its type. In some cases, however, this will unfortunately fail. Then the key question is whether the changes in external appearance and internal anatomy which are considered necessary, still conform to the official breed standard or not.

I would now like to deal with the first mentioned case constellation and only with the second in the next section. The dogs in a breed are only to a certain extent uniform in their phenotype; indeed there exists a considerable range. Furthermore it is noticeable again and again that there is considerable room for interpretation within one and the same breed standard, and that different judges come to very different value judgements. Very often there is no contradiction to the breed standard at all, if relatively light dogs with slightly longer muzzles and a much less extreme head shape are bred, even if another standard interpretation happens to be en vogue. The more moderate standard interpretation is then within the permissible range of the recognised appearance of a breed and does not change this appearance in this respect. According to current FCI law, such a thing is permissible and legitimate. If existing problems can be solved with reasonable standard interpretations and carefully developed selection programmes, I regard this as the method of choice. In this case cross-breeding should be avoided. But it could also be that this method will not be successful. Then the breed would have to be abandoned or cross-breeding programmes established to save it. A serious problem also arises if urgently needed breeding programmes are not carried out for a long time, although this would have been possible.

Assuming that a dog breed has serious, widespread, genetically distinctly influenced problems that cannot be adequately controlled by scientifically supported selection measures, cross-breeding is a legitimate way to address these problems. If it is used, it should be done in a well thought-out and far-sighted manner. First generation cross-breeding dogs should not bear the name of one of the two original breeds, but should be given their own name. Only then would potential buyers be correctly informed. The animals should not be registered in the stud book of one of the two original breeds, but should be recorded in detail in a separate document or a separate appendix. For a certain number of generations, cross-bred dogs should be bred separately from the population of pure-bred dogs in order to assess their genetic characteristics. At this stage, pure-bred dogs may be introduced into the cross-breeding population, but not vice versa. Only after a certain number of generations have a positive outcome should a decision be made as to whether it is appropriate to introduce them into the original breed population, whether a new breed should be created based on the cross-breed population, or whether cross-breeding should be considered a failure. Breeding control procedures and data collection in cross-breeding programmes must be at least as thorough as for recognised breeds. The pedigree certificates of cross-breeding dogs should only carry the FCI logo if the World Federation has approved this. The introduction of cross-breeds that have been bred and controlled over generations into the FCI breed population requires the approval of the FCI and the Kennel Club of the country of origin. If this is refused, it is still possible to apply for the recognition of a new breed. I consider this possibility to be absolutely legitimate. Assuming that a functioning population resulting from cross-breeding differs so greatly from an original breed that the country of origin of the original breed does not accept this, then under current law neither the FCI nor the country of origin can be forced to recognise the animals under the original breed designation. The more moderate animals belonging to the new population could then be defined as a new breed in the event of a refusal to belong to an existing breed. National Kennel Clubs would then be allowed to recognise them (nationally), and be able to speak out and campaign for their international recognition by the FCI. If I personally had to decide at an international level, the Continental Bulldog, for example, would be recognized by the FCI, even if it somewhat resembles an existing breed. According to the legal view I take, if cross-breeding programmes are carried out as described above, they are in accordance with all FCI regulations and therefore legal in this sense. However, I would only practice them if well thought-out selection programs do not lead to success or take too long to establish, although it might have been possible.

Nobody is served by inactivity or a disintegration of the FCI populations into fragments and rival breeders groups. Although the FCI has no authority to issue directives, it does have a position of power and responsibility. Who else but the FCI is to bring the many member countries around the table, keep them continuously informed and promote a common, coordinated approach time and time again?