

# **Submission to the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare working group on the welfare of pedigree dogs.**

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January 2009

## **1 Executive summary**

Drawing from experience of the Clumber spaniel, one of the dog breeds identified as damaged and diseased through its regulation by the Kennel Club (KC), this paper will present a summary of:

- The KC's hasty response to criticism
- Its role in the breed's deterioration
- The contrast between the KC's claims and actions
- The example of improvement from those who work the breed
- The harmful effects of dog showing *per se*
- Why the KC should not be given new powers
- Recommendations.

## **2 The KC's hasty response to a challenge to its reputation**

The current focus on dog breeding came about because of a BBCtv documentary *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*, aired in mid-August 2008, that was deeply critical of the KC. Just six weeks later the KC announced a comprehensive review of breed standards and the development of health plans for each breed, while lobbying government for a statutory role in their implementation. Does the KC have no shame? Or does it think the public, and our politicians, so simple that its announcement of a belated review of dog breeding will be accepted as a conversion borne of conviction?

Its announcement also came some three weeks after the Working Clumber Spaniel Society (WCSS), the body representing the Clumber spaniel as a functional gundog, warned the KC that it intended to change its rules to reject the breed standard. It offered its help in a fundamental review of the breed standard as an alternative to rejecting it. It pointed out that while the KC trumpeted its primary objective as "*to promote in every way, the general improvement of dogs*", in practice it conspicuously failed to back such fine words with positive action.

## **3 The deficiencies of the KC in allowing and assisting in the breed's deterioration**

The WCSS noted that a previous application to express, in its rules, opposition to changes to the breed standard introduced in 1986, had been refused by the KC, while those changes were the fourth alteration to the breed standard during the 20th century – in each case describing an increase in weight.

As a consequence the breed standard of 2008 described a Clumber spaniel dog of *double* the weight of the same dog in 1908 (when 40 – 45 lb was specified). To alter the breed standard in this way, over time radically increasing the breed's approved size to accommodate the failure of show breeders and show judges to

conform, is not in the interests of the breed, not consistent with the KC's stated primary objective. This process of continuous enlargement directly contradicts statements now appearing on the KC website: "*Breed standards are a blueprint for a healthy dog . . . we actively discourage the exaggeration of features in any breed . . . The standards have been, and will continue to be amended, when necessary to ensure the breeding of healthy, well-conformed dogs.*"

While the KC is attempting to reinvent itself as the guardian of breeding quality and health in dogs, and seeking new legislative powers to enforce its decisions, its record tells a wholly different story. It is regarded by many in the dog world outside the exhibition ring as a force for deterioration that is monopolistic, bureaucratic and compromised by its dependence on income from show interests. Why else would it have colluded in the continuous exaggeration of breeds and periodically changed the standards to match the dogs? It should, of course, have enforced compliance to earlier standards.

#### **4 The contrast between the KC's claims and the actions actually taken**

Proposed changes to the Clumber spaniel breed standard are now (mid-January 2009) shown on the KC website. These are only slightly modified from the "interim" standard it introduced on January 1 for consultation. That version described weights of 80 lb for dogs and 65 lb for bitches as maxima. They had previously (1986-2008) been defined as "*ideal*". Ideal for whom, it may well be asked, when the pre-1986 standard had given weights of 55-70 lb for dogs and 45-60 lb for bitches. The modified interim standard, apparently adopted by the KC while ignoring the WCSS submission calling for more radical weight reductions, shows weight definitions submitted by the breed club (ie show interests): these now call ideal, weights for dogs of 65-75 lb and bitches 55-65 lb. It is movement in the right direction, and the first reduction in weights ever, so welcome, but too marginal to be anything more than token.

Weight is the core issue in determining type. The other changes in the breed standard shown on the KC site are sensible in limiting exaggeration, and not before time, but will be of no value in fulfilling the KC's trumpeted claim – that standards have now been amended to ensure that all dogs are fit for their original function – unless weight is reduced to the kind of level evidenced by today's working specimens, which probably means 45-55 lb for dogs, 35-45 lb for bitches. That suggests a further 20 lb off, around another third. The notion of expecting a spaniel of 80 lb, or even a little less, to hunt for long periods, in thick cover or difficult terrain, is simply ridiculous to a field sportsman. The dog will exhaust itself in no time just carting its own body weight about.

The Clumber also suffers hereditary defects and diseases that have been allowed to accompany its growth in size. Structural weaknesses manifest themselves in hip, elbow and back troubles. The breed is still among the very worst to exhibit hip dysplasia, despite the improvement to the mean score coming from working specimens (see below). Entropion (an eye defect) remains a problem, requiring correction by surgery. Inefficient tear-ducts are another, not easily dealt with. In show-bred dogs, a short muzzle, folds of skin falling into the face, short legs, a long back and an excessively full coat all handicap their potential for work, while the discouragement of coloured markings in favour of a largely white coat means loss of skin pigment and a resulting sensitivity.

## **5 The example available to the KC, but disregarded, of improvement in the same breed by those who use it as a working gundog**

While its members have effectively ignored the KC breed standard, the WCSS has developed its own breeding commendation scheme which has been regarded as a model of good sense. In less than a quarter of a century since its formation, the society has helped achieve a remarkable transformation in the fortunes of Britain's largest land spaniel. Much progress has been witnessed in the soundness, lack of exaggeration, trainability and field performance of Clumber spaniels. What has been achieved has been despite the Kennel Club's regulatory role, not because of it.

The society has encouraged the breeding of specimens free from major faults and exaggerations, of more modest size, of good temperaments suited to training and work. It has arranged a regular programme of field trials and other competitive events as platforms for the objective assessment of demonstrably good work.

Among the minority spaniel breeds (field, Sussex, Welsh springer, American cocker and Clumber spaniels), Clumbers dominate. In the past 10 shooting seasons, 11 different dogs have won field trials, while in the previous 84 there was just one (a dog of mine, in 1990).

Data from more than 5000 X-rays shows the average score for hip dysplasia in work-bred Clumbers is 12 (low being good); for others it is 55: overall it remains stubbornly around 40, the worst or second worst in the dog world.

In size and type, temperament and trainability, pace and punch, Clumbers have been restored to a Victorian model that owes nothing to the breed standard, but meets the expectations of sportsmen. Demand continues to grow for these appealing gundogs in the field.

The society has gained the respect of the shooting community and has been well supported by its members, to the point where it is numerically stronger than the breed club. It has thereby demonstrated that it represents a body of opinion about the future of the breed that is, in fact, the mainstream; and that showing, and breeding for show without regard to the breed's real characteristics and needs, is a marginal activity.

There is only one organisation involved in Clumber spaniels which can point to a record of service to the breed and achievement in the improvement of its health, and that is the WCSS – not the breed club, and not the KC.

Yet, amazingly, the WCSS was not informed by the KC of the review of the breed standard taking place, and the development of a breed health plan, and had to ask to participate. If any organisation was in a position to demonstrate from experience what works in Clumbers, it is the WCSS, yet the KC had apparently chosen not to involve it.

While the KC was reluctantly persuaded to consult the WCSS, it appears to have taken no notice at all of its recommendations in the new, modified interim breed standard. In it, it presents the illogical contradiction of requiring that a Clumber "*should be firm, fit and capable of a day's work in the field*", while describing weights so high that this aim is not so much laudable as laughable to any sportsman with experience of trying to achieve it.

## **6 The deleterious effects of dog showing *per se***

The showing of animals, be they dogs, horses, guinea pigs or pigeons, has inevitable consequences: it causes exaggeration of each type to be increasingly divergent from similar types, encourages the fixing of genetic errors as variations to create new types and, by selecting for appearance only, downgrades other, essential and enduring features, including most importantly temperament, freedom from structural defects, intelligence and the practical aptitudes for which each type of animal was originally developed.

In pedigree dogs, judging is undertaken by breeders. It follows that the forces that shape evolution in dog breeds (and the erosion of common sense) have a momentum that makes exaggeration unstoppable. Human nature will prevent any serious challenge from today's judge to an exhibitor doing the judging next week.

In Clumbers, it is the handlers, breeders and supporters of *working* dogs who will continue the breed's improvement based not on the whims of fashion, sanctioned by changing standards, but on practical qualities, soundness and the demands of work.

## **7 Why the KC should not be entrusted with new powers**

The KC has shown itself to be unfit for the responsibility it already holds for safeguarding dog health and sound breeding. Yet it is seeking a role from government for which it is thoroughly unqualified.

Its response to criticism has been a hasty attempt to shore up its reputation by a belated initiative that should never have become necessary had it fulfilled its supervisory role properly over more than a century.

It appears to be going through the motions of a review without willingly consulting expert and experienced groups with proven credentials, keen to help.

It appears to be ready to ignore their advice when given. This echoes the lack of attention given in the 1980s to Dr Willis' unequivocal advice.

It is financially dependent on dog showing and thereby unable to act as a robust, independent regulator, or to balance the needs of interests other than showing.

It allows no individual or club to be represented by or affiliated to any other body, thereby acting as a restraint on freedom of action.

## **8 Recommendations to APGAW**

- To conclude that, as a failed, unresponsive and partial organisation, the KC should not be sustained by being given more powers.
- To consider giving encouragement to another organisation, better qualified, to set up as an alternative registry and regulatory body for working dogs, to compete with the KC which enjoys an undeserved monopoly.