



## Puppy farming

Print

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Policy

The AVA is opposed to puppy farming.

Where companion animals such as dogs and cats are bred, the conditions must meet the physical, behavioural and social needs of the breeding animals and their offspring.

Robust, enforceable breeder standards or compulsory codes of practice must be in place, and breeders must be government licensed, identified, traceable and independently inspected on a regular basis. Veterinarians should be involved in the development of breeder standards.

Background

The following focuses on puppy farming; however, these problems may also occur with other companion animal species such as cats. It should also be noted that similar conditions may occur as a result of hoarding.

Definition

Puppy farming refers to the intensive over-breeding of dogs under inappropriate conditions which fail to meet the animals' behavioural, social and physiological

needs<sup>1</sup>. Puppy farms may contain large numbers of breeding animals confined in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions that lead to health and psychological problems in breeding animals and their offspring. They are usually large-scale commercial operations, but similarly inadequate conditions may also exist in small volume breeding establishments which may or may not be run for profit<sup>1</sup>.

In puppy farms, dogs are provided with minimal, if any, health care and may be permanently confined in cages. Puppies are often poorly socialised and unhealthy as a result of their inappropriate rearing environments. The scale of puppy farming is unknown, although believed to be widespread. Puppy farming is a major companion animal welfare issue with a high level of public concern.

To help avoid inadvertently purchasing from puppy farmers, prospective buyers should:

- Meet the breeder in person
- Visit the facilities and view the parent animals.

## Issues

Major impediments to investigating and prosecuting puppy farming are as follows.

1. Inability to locate puppy farm facilities. Lack of legislation requiring breeder identification in many jurisdictions means that locating puppy farms is difficult. Puppy farmers use many avenues of sale including internet, newspapers, markets and wholesale supply to pet shops, in order to remain inconspicuous. In order to locate these facilities, animal welfare inspectorates such as the RSPCA must often rely on complaints from the public who have seen them first-hand. However, puppies are

often delivered to prospective buyers so that the locations of breeding facilities remain hidden.

2. Lack of relevant animal welfare legislation in some jurisdictions. The state must prove failure in duty of care in the absence of specific dog breeder standards.
3. Animal management legislation, although typically requiring registration and often microchipping of dogs and cats, does not specifically regulate their breeding, sale or supply.

## Recommendations

Four main policy instruments are proposed:

1. Development of compulsory dog breeder Standards to be adopted under state animal welfare legislation.
2. Establishment of a single, centralised breeder identification system in each jurisdiction, linked to puppy identification.
3. Inspections and enforcement; breeder premises to be inspected by Councils or the registering authority at regular intervals to ensure compliance with the Dog Breeder Standards. The Standards to be used as the basis of investigation and prosecution by state animal welfare regulators (usually RSPCA) when puppy farm activity is identified.
4. Development of a public education strategy so that consumers buy only from identified breeders.

## Dog Breeder Standards

Enforceable Dog Breeder Standards are an important tool to support investigations and prosecutions of suspected puppy farming activities or to form the basis of

regular compliance inspections linked to breeder identification renewals. These Standards should be adopted into legislation as compulsory codes under the respective state animal welfare legislation.

Dog Breeder Standards should include chapters covering at least the following topics: responsibilities of owners; animal health and veterinary care; housing and environment, hygiene and management; breeding and rearing; socialisation and environmental enrichment; management of inherited disorders; transfer of ownership and requirements for identification.

Specific Standards should include: minimum age of breeding, maximum number of litters in a lifetime of a breeding bitch, maximum age of breeding; appropriate preventative health regimens including veterinary examinations; management of breeding activities including mating and whelping; rearing, weaning, socialization and practices that promote behavioural health and wellbeing; housing and space requirements; and requirements for record keeping.

Dog breeder identification

Puppies must not be advertised or sold or supplied without a microchip that enables identification and traceability of the breeder of origin. The breeder must be recorded on the microchip register against the animal's microchip number.

All breeders must be required to be identified within the system, whether they own one or many breeding bitches. There should not be a threshold number of breeding bitches associated with breeder identification legislation (as has been proposed in several jurisdictions), as the welfare of each individual animal is paramount.

Veterinarians in practice do see cases of individual bitches being over-bred and receiving inadequate health care throughout their lives, having multiple litters without time to fully recover in between each pregnancy. This takes an enormous biological

toll on the bitch and may shorten and reduce the quality of her life. The problem is not isolated to the large-scale puppy farms and any legislation to address the issue should be cognizant of this fact.

It should be a mandatory requirement for the breeder's licence/registration number to be displayed in all advertisements and at any point of sale.

This requirement should apply to any context including online internet advertisements, pet stores, markets, printed advertisements, fairs, and any other advertisement and point of sale. In those states that do not have a breeder licence/registration scheme there should be a requirement to display the animal's microchip number.

Inspections and enforcement

Issues of compliance, inspection and enforcement of the Dog Breeder Standards and breeder identification system need to be resolved at a government departmental level and include registering authorities such as local councils as well as animal welfare inspectorates such as the RSPCA.

Public education

Public education programs should inform potential buyers about the need to buy from identified breeders. Websites advertising pet sales should be informed of their responsibility to sell only those puppies linked to identifiable breeders.

Community expectations

This is a sensitive issue with a high level of public engagement. It is important to distinguish between reputable, caring breeders and puppy farmers. Society places a high value on companion animals and views puppy farms as exploitative and cruel. Implementation of effective policies as outlined above requires investment in public



education and additional resourcing of enforcement agencies such as the RSPCA to ensure that any legislation implemented is able to be enforced.

References

1. RSPCA Australia Knowledgebase: What is a puppy farm?

2015. [http://kb.rspca.org.au/what-is-a-puppy-farm\\_322.html](http://kb.rspca.org.au/what-is-a-puppy-farm_322.html)

#### Further reading

RSPCA Australia. The smart puppy and dog buyer's guide. <http://www.rspcapuppyguide.com.au/>

RSPCA Australia. Discussion Paper: puppy farms.

2010. <http://kb.rspca.org.au/download/55/>

RSPCA Australia. Discussion Paper: end puppy farming – the way forward.

2014. <http://kb.rspca.org.au/download/76/>