

## Reports and Comments

### Codes of Practice for the welfare of companion animals in England: dogs, cats and equines. A lesson in devolved decision-making?

In November 2008, the devolved Welsh Regional Assembly published the first Codes of Practice for the welfare of cats, dogs and equines, as called for under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Over a year on, Defra has now published their version of the same Codes for England (the Scottish Parliament still has yet to do so, although they have consulted).

These Codes highlight the differences that can arise between the regions through their devolved legislative powers in the area of animal health and welfare and their consultation processes and it is interesting to compare their solutions to the same task. Whilst both sets of Codes use a framework based upon the Five Freedoms, with sections that give advice on the need for a suitable environment, diet, exhibition of normal behaviour, companionship and health and welfare, the Defra/English Codes are much briefer and to the point and dispense with the more extensive (and at times, arguably contentious) guidance that was contained within the second of the two-part Welsh codes; the Defra dog code runs to 9 pages for example, the two sections of the Welsh to 56.

As might be expected by this discrepancy, the legislative touch for English pet owners is a much lighter one than is experienced by the Welsh. For example, and as previously reported in the Report and Comment on the Welsh Codes, the summary section on 'Environment' in the Dog code requires owners to "make sure your dog has a suitable place to live" by providing it with "a comfortable, dry, draught-free resting area to which it has constant access and where it feels safe" and that it is "kept away from potentially harmful substances". This contrasts with the Defra Code which states that "Your dog needs a safe environment.... and protection from hazards". The resting area needs to be "comfortable, clean, dry, quiet" and "draught free", although there is no requirement for constant access nor that this resting area has to be the place where the dog feels safe (although it should have access to such a place). Further, there is no requirement in the Defra Code, unlike the Welsh, that dogs have a specific bed "with no sharp corners or splinters as these may cause injury", nor that any large plants that the dogs have contact with "are in a stable container that cannot be knocked over" or that owners should "clean up after your dog at home using a plastic bag or 'pooper scooper' and to dispose of any faeces in the waste bin, particularly where there are children around". Whether you feel that these omissions are a good or bad thing is likely to depend upon your views on the role of legislation and the common-sense of the public. Certainly, if the devil is in the detail, the Defra Codes seem to be trying to trying to ensure that it is a much-reduced devil.

In the place of Part 2 of the Welsh Codes, the Defra Codes are content to direct owners to other sources of information,

of which the owners' veterinary surgeon is identified as the primary and most important, along with the websites of numerous animal welfare charities and other concerned organisations (something the Welsh Codes do too but which, because of their length, feels more secondary). This former approach clearly requires the legislative body to have faith that the named organisations, such as the Dogs Trust and RSPCA, will be able to fulfil their role as sources of relevant information and that their advice will not conflict. The more prescriptive route taken by the Welsh Codes avoids this issue, but means that the advice in the Codes will need to be more regularly reviewed by the Welsh Assembly to ensure that it stays current and reflects changes in knowledge.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Defra equine Code differs in tone from the cat and dog Codes in that it is slightly lengthier and more similar to the Welsh Code, which itself is closely akin to the long-standing and successful codes that exist for sheep, cattle and other farmed animals — a reflection of the way they are housed and managed perhaps and not on the place they hold in peoples' lives.

It is with interest that we await the publication of the Scottish version of the Codes; will they follow the lead of the Welsh or Defra codes or will they adopt another, third approach? The decision they take will demonstrate which of the style of Codes they prefer and may place pressure on the unfavoured regional style and Codes to be amended to come in line with the others.

**The Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Cats, Dogs and Equines** (2009). A4, 8 pages (cat), 9 (dog), 25 (equines). Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, London, UK. Copies of these documents are available for download from: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/pets/cruelty/index.htm>

*S Wickens*

*UFAW*

### Pedigree dog health and welfare part 2. Findings of the Bateson inquiry into dog breeding

With the publication of the Bateson 'Independent Inquiry into Dog Breeding', the likely future for dog breeding in the UK becomes clearer. This report, by Professor Sir Patrick Bateson FRS, follows close on the heels of that of The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare's report into the health and welfare issues surrounding the breeding of pedigree dogs, which was published in November 2009 (and which was the subject of a Report and Comment in *Animal Welfare* 20:1). Taken together, these complimentary reports challenge the current *status quo* of The Kennel Club's control and regulation of the breeding of pedigree (and other) dogs in the UK and raise the distinct possibility that, in line with their key recommendations, it passes instead to a non-statutory Advisory Council on Dog Breeding. The Bateson report advises that the role of this Council should be "to develop evidence-based breeding strategies that address the issues of poor conformation, inherited disease and inbreeding, as appropriate to the