

27 January 2018  
The Bulldog Club Taskforce  
Press/Media release

### **Trade Me ban on Pugs, British Bulldogs and French Bulldogs: How you like them apples?**

On 17<sup>th</sup> January 2018 Trademe announced that they were banning the sale of three brachycephalic breeds: Pugs, French Bulldogs and British Bulldogs or derivative cross breeds on their platform. The basis was the prevalence of Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (**"BOAS"**) in those breeds with reference made to 90-95% of these dogs in New Zealand being affected by BOAS. This announcement was supported actively by the SPCA and as more and more media statements were released the 90-95% became mantra and it was suggested that the breeding and ownership of these breeds was tantamount to animal abuse. Since then breeders, dog owners and their children have been publicly shamed and bullied simply for owning a Pug, Frenchie or a Bulldog.

In recent days the SPCA has it seems doubled down on its claims by posting photos of breed skulls in support of Trademe's decision which the SPCA stated was *"due to a medical condition the breeds share"* (we presume they mean BOAS). The SPCA post went on to state that *"large numbers of these dogs live with chronic pain and distress, with many owners unaware that their dog is suffering"*.

The Bulldog Club Taskforce has the scientific article that has been used primarily, to back up the policy statement by Trademe and the statements by the SPCA. It is an article based upon a study undertaken in the UK by veterinarian researchers in the Department of Veterinary Science at the University of Cambridge (**"UK Study"**). The article was published in August 2017.

The Bulldog Club Taskforce has been aware of this article since its publication. The Bulldog Club Taskforce is in fact in discussions with DogsNZ about supporting research at Massey University which will use the Cambridge BOAS index model in order to gain insight into the prevalence or frequency of the condition in New Zealand. So, you can imagine our surprise when the same British article became the basis for 90-95% of our dogs in New Zealand being diagnosed with BOAS, in absentia.

So, let's talk apples:

- The UK Study was completed with a small sample of dogs (604). Of the UK Study population, between 4.5% (Bulldogs) and 17.3% (French bulldogs) were dogs who had been referred to the University for corrective surgery, having been diagnosed with Grade II/III BOAS prior to admission to the UK Study. The remainder were volunteered or show dogs examined at a dog show.
- The UK Study's' objective was to identify risk factors for BOAS in the visible shape and size (conformation) of these breeds. The objective of the UK Study was not to determine the prevalence or frequency of BOAS. The UK Study hoped to provide a simple method for owners and breeders of these dogs to view and diagnose BOAS and its level of severity, to assist breeding programs and help with recognition of disease. It was not intended to be used as the basis for a company's policy decision on the sale of dogs or as a means of propaganda.

- Researchers were clear that dogs identified with grade 0 and 1 in the UK Study should be excluded from BOAS prevalence figures as grade 0 dogs were not affected and grade 1 dogs were not considered clinically affected by BOAS. That excluded 35.5% of pugs, 41.1% of French bulldogs and 48.7% of British bulldogs sampled in the UK Study from having clinical BOAS.
- Further the dogs in the UK Study that had been previously diagnosed with Grade II or III BOAS and been referred for surgical intervention, should also have been excluded from prevalence figures as their predetermination as affected dogs excluded them as random samples for the purposes of research. Their inclusion, would by their nature skew and therefore unfairly increase the prevalence rates.
- The inclusion of those affected dogs in the UK Study however reflected and reinforced the fact that the UK Study objective was not to determine the frequency of BOAS it was to consider visible signs of the disease. The objective of the UK Study was certainly not to draw generalised and flawed conclusions relating to the entire population of Pugs, French bulldogs and British bulldogs in New Zealand.
- However, it would seem that both the dogs referred for surgery, and those identified as grade 1, have erroneously been included in the 90-95% statistic used by Trademe and the SPCA. Without them the prevalence and percentages fall considerably. With them included they create a false picture of the state of our breeds in New Zealand and mislead the public.
- Contrary to the SPCA's comments on skull size the UK Study stated that such measurements were NOT an accurate diagnosis tool for BOAS. In fact, the researchers state that the measurement of conformation such as skull size and muzzle is an unreliable tool and would likely contribute less than 50% in the identification of BOAS.
- Rather the two key visual predictors for BOAS identified in the UK Study were not the shortness of muzzle or size of skull. The two key predictors were **nostril size** and **obesity** in dogs. Relatively thicker necks were also considered a predictor although the data was less certain.
- So, to be clear a dog (any dog long or short snout) if hot would pant but would also breath largely through its nose. Any dog if its nostrils were pinched would have difficulty breathing, add extra body fat and this would in all likelihood lead to greater stress and an inability to regulate heat or exercise. Overtime if not fixed this could cause ongoing obstructive airway problems requiring corrective surgery. The issue has a name for brachycephalic breeds in BOAS but they are not alone in such issues.
- The UK Study compared BOAS to sleep apnoea in humans. But pinched nostrils, obesity or fat necks are not limited to brachycephalic dog breeds. Nor is obesity or fat necks in humans for that matter.

- Finally, the article writers placed the following limitation on their research:

*“As all the UK study dogs were recruited from the UK, the results may have limited significance on these breeds in other regions of the world.”*

So how you like them apples?

This is the UK Study that Trademe and the SPCA have used to base their decisions and media statements about the welfare of our breeds in New Zealand and to inform the public. They did this rather than speaking to New Zealand based veterinarians who have extensive experience with brachycephalic breed dogs. Vets who have stated that in their experience of these breeds the number they have seen requiring corrective surgery would be closer to 20%. This would be well below the 50% prevalence rates in the UK and certainly well below 90-95%.

You have to ask why didn't Trademe and the SPCA do their due diligence before making statements that are clearly inaccurate and refutable. Why didn't they talk to the New Zealand experts and to the clubs and Dogs NZ who with responsible breeders always want to improve and are working hard to get the percentages down further, because we all want healthy, active and well-mannered dogs?

In taking this path to sensationalism Trademe and the SPCA have misrepresented the facts and caused considerable distress to the many owners who love their dogs and who like responsible breeders are being vilified and bullied because of their statements. The public trust organisations such as Trademe and SPCA to get it right. They didn't this time and should retract those statements publicly. The media in publicizing their views should hold Trademe and the SPCA to account on the basis of being factual, fair and balanced in their reporting.

The Bulldog Club Taskforce promotes and supports responsible breeding practices to produce active and healthy French and British Bulldogs. The Taskforce is made up of the 5 national bulldog breed clubs who jointly have well over 150 years' experience with these breeds. Breeds themselves that have been in existence for centuries. The Bulldog Club Taskforce's aim is to be advocates for our breeds and to educate and inform owners and breeders of bulldogs.

The Auckland Bulldog Club  
The Central Bulldog Club  
The Wellington Bulldog Club  
The Southern Bulldog Club  
The French Bulldog Society