

Global co-operation by Simon Parsons

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IN TODAY'S world of dog breeding it is impossible for anyone, even the Brits, to exist in isolation. Breeders, indeed, have generally been far ahead of their governing bodies in recognising this and I often feel that it is a pity that the infrastructure which the breeders have to work under is not more similar around the world.

There are so many aspects where it would be of benefit to us all if things were the same worldwide.

I'm not so much thinking of, for example, show systems, champion titles and judging approval, important though these may be, but even more basic aspects like registration systems, recognition of breeds, publication of data and health tests.

In the 21st century, should it really be the case that breeds are recognised by one governing body, but not another, that health tests results are not uniform, that some kennel clubs (like, to its credit, our own) publish everything about the dogs they register and some (like the American Kennel Club), publish nothing, not even the numbers it registers?

So that is why I feel that the International Partnership for Dogs (IPFD), which is aiming to create a 'DogWellNet' website co-ordinating data of dog health, breeding and ownership, is one of the most important steps forward of recent times.

The IPFD is legally registered in Sweden, and is a non-profit organisation whose mission is 'to facilitate collaboration and sharing of resources to enhance the health, well-being and welfare of pedigreed dogs and all dogs worldwide'.

National kennel clubs from Sweden, Finland, Germany, France, Norway and the UK plus the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (US) and the Agria Pet Insurance-SKC Fund (Sweden) have made formal commitments to move this work forward. The FCI is an 'initiating patron' and has provided seed funding for the establishment of the IPFD.

The first meeting of the board was held in August at the KC in London. Chairman is Pekka Olson from Sweden with our Caroline Kisko as vice-chairman, and other members come from the US, Germany, France and Finland. Brenda Bonnett from Canada is chief executive officer and Sweden's Ulf Uddman is chief financial officer.

It will engage additional partners/members from throughout the world, including additional canine organisations, professional and academic groups, and corporate, non-profit and industry partners.

The aim is 'to offer a non-partisan and a-political platform where the focus is directly on the goals of advancing the health, well-being and welfare of dogs'. Now that the dog world is truly global with breeding, 'human-dog interactions' and competitions all occurring on a world-wide stage, it is hoped that the IPFD and DogWellNet will 'help bring the global dog world together'.

The web platform will function as an information hub, providing links, documents and additional resources to breeders and others in the dog world; its design and structure revolves around bringing people together. The software will allow for the creation of 'forums' where groups can effectively communicate, share information, reach consensus, and more.

That's the aim, and now we can begin to see the reality, for the web platform (DogWellNet.com) was launched at the second International Dog Health Workshop, hosted recently by the German Kennel Club (VDH).

Take a look at the site – I did and it is indeed impressive, with already an enormous amount of information coordinated for the benefit of breeders, judges, vets and so on, and of course there is infinite space to expand this as time goes on.

Surely this is what we have been needing for years, an easily accessible forum where the latest research can be shared internationally and publicly.

Dare I suggest that the next worthwhile step would be a move towards mutual acceptance of health test results? Appallingly, when Yvonne Knapper brought this up at our KC's annual meeting a few years back, she was treated with disdain. Can we hope for a change of heart?

Incidentally, I was pleased to see a few weeks ago that the Fédération Cynologique Internationale has finally agreed to join the Partnership. Apparently this decision involved 'deep consideration' as well as 'time and efforts' – have to say I can't quite see why the federation needed to agonise so much about what you would have thought was a fairly obvious and non-controversial course of action.

It adds a piece of spin: "For decades the FCI has been a pioneer in ensuring and promoting healthy dogs and breeding." Is this so? Certainly some of the governing bodies which come under its umbrella, notably those in Scandinavia, have long been concerned with health issues, but I must admit I hadn't been aware of what the FCI itself had been doing until very recently. Still, that's nit-picking, and it's good news that the FCI is part of the partnership.

The FCI under its new president Rafael de Santiago also seems to be doing a lot more now to encourage young people in the world of dogs so let's hope attitudes are changing there too.

Pity one can't say the same about the attitude of its Asia Pacific section and the ludicrous 'blacklisting' of judges who have officiated at shows within its area which it doesn't recognise.

I mentioned this a few weeks ago and now it seems to have led to an outright rift with the AKC which has retaliated. As from February 13, no FCI judge from a country within the Asia Pacific Section where there is a full FCI member registry will be approved to judge an AKC show. This would apply to any future applied for or previously approved assignments.

One club which could be affected is the Japanese Chin Club of America which has invited the internationally respected Hiroshi Kamisato from Japan to judge its forthcoming national specialty. This leaves the club, through no fault of its own, with a big dilemma and it will be interesting to see what transpires.

What is more, the AKC has threatened that if the blacklist is not removed in 90 days, no FCI judges at all would be approved to judge at AKC shows!

What a mess. Let's hope that this can all be sorted out quickly. Could not the AKC set an example and not descend to the same level as the Asia/Pacific? This tit for tatting is how wars begin...