

Health and welfare impact of extreme breeding

Companion animal vets worldwide voice concern about new 'pug' film



Brussels, 25 June 2018 – Extreme breeding causes serious health and welfare problems: veterinarians are voicing their concern about the promotion of flat-faced dogs in films and social media, as this is likely to boost consumer demand for such dogs. Recent reactions were prompted by the announcement of the upcoming Disney film 'Patrick', in which a pug plays a feature role.

Pugs are a so-called brachycephalic or flat-faced dog breed, just like French and English bulldogs. Due to their extreme conformation, they are prone to many health issues,' stressed Wolfgang Dohne, president of the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations (FECAVA). While pets are bred this way to

make them more appealing to buyers, *'the reality is that these exaggerated features can lead to breathing difficulties, recurring skin infections, eye diseases and spinal or neurological problems, severely impacting their health and welfare.'*

To raise awareness about health and welfare issues in breeding, FECAVA recently adopted a [position paper](#) on healthy breeding, jointly with the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE).

'Celebrities, social media and filmmakers strongly contribute to increasing the popular demand of certain breeds. Over the past few years, this has led to a real explosion in the number of brachycephalic dogs such as the French bulldog,' confirmed Monique Megens, FECAVA representative of the joint animal welfare committee of FVE and the Union of European Veterinary Practitioners. *'This is a worrying trend, as the exaggerated features of these dogs means that many need invasive surgery to allow them to breathe normally.'*

'Our profession is very concerned about this development, which not only has an impact on dog health and welfare but also on consumer protection,' stressed Rafael Laguens, FVE president. *'As vets, it is our role to educate our clients*

and to speak up and raise awareness about the consequences of exaggerated breeding. The FVE general assembly recently adopted a joint FECAVA/FVE policy paper on this topic.'

He applauded the recent initiative by the UK [Brachycephalic Working Group \(BWG\)](#), which had contacted Disney to try reduce the negative impact of its upcoming film.

The BWG, comprised of vets, breed clubs, welfare charities and academics, also expressed concerns that the film could lead to a surge in demand for pugs. Steps agreed by Disney and BWG include:

- ◆ an added a welfare message to the credits section, explaining the health issues pugs face
 - ◆ leaflet distribution to journalists and the public at UK cinemas, raising awareness of leading health issues in the breed and explaining that ownership should not be undertaken lightly
 - ◆ images of pugs dressed in human clothing will not be used in marketing for the film
 - ◆ no merchandising of Patrick pug memorabilia
- BWG will also support development of film industry

initiatives to ensure that potential animal welfare implications are considered prior to future movies that prominently feature animals

On 26 June, FECAVA and FVE representatives will furthermore join forces with the EU Dog and Cat Alliance to raise awareness about extreme breeding in the [European Parliament](#).

'This is not just a European issue,' confirmed Walt Ingwersen, president of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA), 'Extreme breeding is a global concern. Our members see the results of extreme brachycephalic confirmation in practice on a regular basis and it is one of our top animal welfare concerns. We have therefore been in discussions with FECAVA and FVE with a view to supporting this policy paper on healthy breeding.'

FECAVA, FVE and WSAVA fully support initiatives such as that of the BWG and urge filmmakers to refrain from using such animals – whether live-action, animated or online videos – as this will increase their popularity.