



THE KENNEL CLUB
Making a difference for dogs

Welfare crisis looms for flat faced dog breeds commonly used in advertising

Organisations with an interest in dog welfare have penned an open letter asking companies to stop using 'flat faced' (brachycephalic) dogs to sell products

- The Brachycephalic Working Group, made up of the veterinary profession, national animal welfare organisations, scientists, and dog breed clubs are calling for companies to stop using flat faced dog breeds, such as Pugs, Bulldogs and French Bulldogs, to endorse and sell products
- Soaring demand for these breeds, fuelled by their prominence in advertising and marketing campaigns, is creating a health and welfare crisis
- Experts believe demand for these dogs, which can suffer from health problems, must be reduced to protect them
- Companies are being asked to pledge not to use these breeds in the future

A group made up of the veterinary profession, animal welfare organisations, scientists and dog breed clubs have issued an open letter to UK companies that use or may use brachycephalic (flat-faced) dog breeds in advertising and marketing campaigns, or on products, urging them to stop using these breeds as it is fuelling a health and welfare crisis.

The Brachycephalic Working Group is warning that certain brachycephalic breeds have seen huge rises in popularity in recent years, fuelled by their increased prominence in advertising. These dogs are often considered to look appealing, cute or comical, but breeding primarily for their looks has led to health problems associated with their body conformation in a substantial proportion of them. These problems include breathing difficulties caused by anatomical defects in the upper airways, recurring skin infections as a result of skin folds, eye disease, inability to give birth naturally or properly regulate body temperature, and spinal disease.

According to registration figures released by the Kennel Club, the French Bulldog has seen a staggering 3,104 per cent increase over the last ten years, the Pug a 193 per cent increase and the Bulldog a 96 per cent increase in the same time period^[1]. However, the number of dogs from these breeds in the country is likely to be far higher in reality, due to undocumented and unregistered dogs and dogs that have been brought into the country illegally from Eastern Europe.

Sudden boosts in popularity of certain breeds can result in a huge and profitable market opening up. Puppies can be churned out with little or no regard for their health and welfare, solely for profit, because they are so easy to sell due to their looks. The use of these breeds to advertise products or services only

perpetuates their appeal. It is widely believed by those with an interest in dog welfare, that ethical advertisers and companies have an important role to play in reducing the demand for breeds that can suffer from health problems.

Dr Dan O'Neill, Senior Lecturer in Companion Animal Epidemiology at the Royal Veterinary College, and Chairman of the Brachycephalic Working Group, said: “There is a real concern that the use of French Bulldogs, Bulldogs and Pugs in adverts is fuelling the popularity of these breeds, and is widening the market for those who simply wish to make money from these dogs with little or no regard for their health and wellbeing.

“These breeds can suffer from some horrible long-term health conditions. Reducing and ultimately eliminating these health problems is a goal shared by all those who care about the health and welfare of dogs, but we are currently fighting a losing battle while these dogs continue to be used needlessly in thoughtless advertising.

“We are heading towards a welfare crisis for these breeds so it is time for companies to prioritise dog welfare over profit and commit to avoiding the use of flat faced dog breeds in advertising. Not only will this make a real difference to the health and welfare of these dogs but it will help to protect the companies from brand damage and make it clear that they take their corporate social responsibility seriously.”

The Brachycephalic Working Group was set up in 2016 to look at ways to tackle the health and welfare issues that can affect brachycephalic dog breeds.

Signatories of the open letter include the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA), the British Veterinary Association (BVA), Bulldog breed clubs, Dogs Trust, French Bulldog breed clubs, the Kennel Club, PDSA (People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals), Pug breed clubs, Royal Veterinary College (RVC), the RSPCA and the University of Cambridge.

Companies are encouraged to contact the Brachycephalic Working Group to pledge their commitment to dog welfare by avoiding the use of brachycephalic breeds in advertising and on products. They can do this by contacting BWG@thekennelclub.org.uk or media@bva.co.uk.

More information on the Brachycephalic Working Group can be found at www.vet.cam.ac.uk/boas/resources-1/brachycephalic-working-group-bwg.

^[1] According to Kennel Club registration figures for French Bulldogs, Pugs and Bulldogs between 2007 and 2016