

NZDJA

**NZ Dog Judges
Association Inc**

Breed Standard Updates

by Lavina Diamanti

In the February NZ Dog World, Dogs NZ advised that all Breed Standards will be updated to amend the common statements at the beginning and end of all standards to the following:

A breed standard is the guideline which describes the ideal characteristics, temperament, and appearance of a breed and ensures that the breed is fit for function with soundness essential. Breeders and judges should at all times be careful to avoid obvious conditions and exaggerations as well as being mindful of features which could be detrimental in any way to the health, welfare or soundness of this breed.

The final paragraph of all standards has been amended to read...

Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree and its effect upon the health and welfare of the dog and on the dog's ability to perform its traditional work.

The crucial change to these statements is the addition of the words *be careful to avoid obvious conditions and exaggerations and on the dog's ability to perform its traditional work.* We now have a clear directive from Dogs NZ that we must also consider any condition or exaggeration which could be detrimental to the health, welfare or soundness of the dog and its ability to perform its traditional work.

So how should this affect us and the way we judge? Some may say we now have a greater responsibility to penalise exaggerations and to understand the history and form and function of the breed better and judge it accordingly. Others will state that we should have been doing this anyway. Either way, it is part of understanding the dogs we are judging and ensuring that we are rewarding not only correct breed type, but healthy, sound dogs, free from exaggeration who are capable of doing the job they were bred for. Those who have sat practical examinations in the last couple of years will be aware that there has been more focus on the origins of breeds, their original purpose and how this affects the form and function of that breed. This has been a directive from the Board to the examiners and will continue to be an important part of the examination process.

So how do judges decide to what degree they take into account any faults or exaggerations? Obviously, this will vary from breed to breed and even group to group and there are pitfalls in fault judging and ignoring the virtues of an exhibit. The direction must always come from the breed standard and the other information available to give us guidance. For example, when looking at the dogs' coat in

your evaluation, the required quality, texture and abundance must be considered in accordance with the original purpose of the breed. Some breeds simply would not survive in their traditional work without the correct coat – think Newfoundland, Siberian Husky, Chesapeake Bay Retriever etc. When judging these breeds, coat quality is very important, and is not, nor should be, just “the icing on the cake”. Other breed standards may place less importance on the coat and therefore quality, quantity and texture may not factor highly in the judge's decisions.

Nostril and breathing issues are a hot topic with the brachycephalic breeds and we must not ignore the work that is being done to ensure these breeds are healthy and sound. Not only do judges have a duty to penalise any exhibits who display breathing issues or exaggerations we now have a directive from Dogs NZ that instructs us to do so.

Some breed standards are very detailed and concise and give clear direction to breeders and judges, many of the FCI standards fall into this category. Others are quite vague and really lacking in direction. Many of these standards were written many years ago by stalwarts of the breeds where it was just assumed that everyone knew what was required, (the Foxhound standard is a good example of this). It is for these breeds in particular, where we need to research the breeds ourselves so we get a good understanding of what is required.

We are very lucky that we now live in the digital age where an abundance of information is just a Google search away. There are lots of good websites with amazing information and breed club sites are a very good place to start. Australia's governing body has some very good extended breed standards on their website www.ankc.org.au, not for all breeds, but certainly for a large number. Be mindful though, of any variances in breed standards if looking at overseas sites. In the first instance, download a copy of the new Dogs NZ standards so you know you have the most up to date versions. The official version can be found under the Judges tab on Dogs NZ website or click on the link from the NZDJA website. Also, check the date at the bottom of each of the standards, this is the date that this version was adopted by Dogs NZ as the official standard. These can and do change from time to time and it is easy to miss these changes when published in the Dog World. And of course, let's not forget the wealth of experience some of our judges and breeders have, I am sure they would be willing to help if asked.