

# NZDJA NZ Dog Judges Association Inc

## Judging healthy dogs

by Lavina Diamanti

We all remember the 2008 BBC programme *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* and the uproar that followed. There was mixed reaction around the world varying from condemnation of pedigree dogs to strong defence from breeders and exhibitors. One thing did change after that programme was aired: the spotlight was now firmly on the health of pedigree dogs and that hasn't gone away.

Following the BBC programme, The Kennel Club (UK) subsequently made significant changes to the running of dog shows, including vet testing some Best of Breed winners. It also implemented Breed Watch in 2014 with their "Fit For Function: Fit For Life" campaign.

Under Breed Watch, show judges (and anyone involved in the dog world) are expected to report health issues and extremities in breeds identified with potential health problems. The Nordic Kennel Union has also implemented Breed Specific Instructions (BSI) regarding exaggerations in pedigree dogs and our own Dogs New Zealand has been active in promoting healthy dogs with its Accredited Breeders programme, Brachycephalic Working Group, litter registration limitations (LRL) scheme, and the employment of Canine Health & Welfare Officer, Dr Becky Murphy.

We all, including show judges, have a part to play in ensuring pedigree dogs are fit and healthy. We know we have the ability, whether intentionally or not, to influence breeds and when we consistently reward extremes in conformation and type, we see breeds change. These changes are not always positive and can be detrimental to the health and well-being of the dogs.

We have probably all seen a German Shepherd with over-exaggerated hindquarters or witnessed one of the brachycephalic breeds huffing and puffing as they go around the ring. We may or may not have awarded them a prize and, in some cases, we may even have withheld a challenge certificate or other award.

But is this enough? Is it sufficient that we just notice a problem? Do we know what problems to look out for in a breed — and if we do, how does it benefit a breed if we do nothing other than decide to not advance that particular dog any further when judging? After all, we cannot critique since our regulations don't allow it. Other than withholding a challenge, up until now there has been no other method of communicating to the breeders that we have identified a potential problem.

I say, up until now, because in June of this year, all judges and breed clubs were sent two documents from NZ Dog Judges Association with details of the Judges Breed Guidelines (JBG) regarding exaggerations in pedigree dogs.

This joint effort between NZDJA and breeders, endorsed by Dogs New Zealand, is based on the Nordic Kennel Union BSI document. The first document sent out gives an overview of the scheme, including a timeline and FAQs. The second document is the proposed Judges Breed Guidelines and includes a submission form so judges and breed clubs can give feedback to the committee prior to the scheme coming into effect on 1 January 2021.

These documents are available on the NZDJA website [www.nzdogjudge.com](http://www.nzdogjudge.com).

The proposed JBG highlights breeds that have been listed as prone to possible exaggerations due to misinterpretation of their breed standard. They are a reminder that more is not always better! As show judges, we have an excellent opportunity to give feedback to breeders and breed clubs of exaggerations that may affect the health and well-being of dogs. We are not vets, and we are not expected to have that level of knowledge, but as judges we should be able to identify a dog that can't breathe easily, has skin or eye problems, unstable hocks or inverted canines. And we are not asking for individual dogs' details or a critique, we are asking for all judges to note the number of dogs in those identified breeds that display those potential problems. Simple as that.

This data will then be collected and referred back to the breed clubs. It is expected that it will also assist judges with identifying exaggerations that have the potential to cause health issues in these breeds.

Canine controlling bodies and breeders around the world are in a battle to stay ahead of the movement against pedigree breeds. Judges, as senior members of the dog world, also have a responsibility in ensuring only specimens with optimal combination of breed type and soundness are awarded in the show ring.

This is our opportunity to play our part to ensure our beautiful pedigree breeds continue to be recognised as a healthy option when puppy buyers are choosing a dog to join their families. 🐾

### Important Dates

29 August	AGM, Pro Plan Auckland Exhibition Centre
31 August	Effective date for breed standards for 2021 exams
19/20 September	Christchurch Practical exams
7/8 November	Auckland Practical exams