

Let's keep our judges judging

by Lavina Diamanti

Recently, Dogs New Zealand announced that All Breeds Championship Shows must include at least one New Zealand judge on each panel for each show. This change was in response to an NZDJA request, and I want to explain this decision a bit further and provide some background to this regulation change.

The journey of a judge in New Zealand is many years from Ribbon Parade panel to All Breeds. How long this takes depends on a number of factors, including whether or not the candidate passes all exams, but just as important is whether or not they can secure the necessary appointments, and subsequently judge the required number of dogs, to be eligible to apply to sit further exams.

In the last couple of years, we have seen an unprecedented number of judges progressing through the system. Quite simply, this was due to COVID-19 regulations, our borders being closed, and the opportunity for our New Zealand judges to fulfil the required number of appointments and number of dogs judged to enable them to be elevated to another panel. Now the borders are open again clubs are choosing to bring in judges from overseas. Unfortunately, our New Zealand judges could potentially be forgotten about. This is why we requested Dogs NZ regulate to support our NZ judges. And that doesn't just mean supporting our All Breeds judges. The intention of this regulation change is to support our judges with only one or a small number of groups. Pre COVID-19, judges looking for promotion were at the mercy of clubs. You see, our judges are not allowed to solicit for appointments. They can't tell a club secretary that they are available to judge for them or will pay their own way if they are given an appointment. They have to wait until they are asked. This is fine if you are well known in the show world, maybe as an exhibitor you are regularly in the ribbons or maybe you are high profile in club administration. But not everyone is in that position.

Some of our new judges are not particularly well known and struggle to get the invitations which then help them get the experience they need and the appointments required to progress. I am aware of one judge, a few years ago, who waited nearly three years before they got their first Championship Show appointment for their first group! They lived in a small provincial town and didn't have a lot of connections with clubs. The knowledge gained from the examination process may well have been lost without the opportunity to cement the learning. With only one group, a judge is not particularly 'useful' to a club. And let's be honest, only when we have at least three or four groups do we start getting regular

appointments across Australasia. Even then, many clubs won't even consider a judge unless they are All Breeds.

Exhibitors and clubs have an expectation that our judges are confident, know their breed standards and can apply them competently. Yet that only comes with practice and regular judging appointments. You don't get to be at the top of your game in anything in life without practice, be it a sport, hobby or a profession. The more we do, the better we get. But how can we get better if we can't get the appointments? We are in a catch 22 position.

If you are a club secretary, I urge you to look at this regulation in the light of its intention. Please use our judges with only a few groups to fulfil the Dogs NZ regulation requirement. Use them to judge Stake classes as well. And judges: be prepared to make yourself 'useful' to a club. This may mean that you need to fund some or all of your travel expenses, especially if you live in provincial NZ. Not all clubs are financially comfortable and the cost of flights can be a huge consideration when choosing a judging panel, even more so post-COVID-19. Another way to make yourself 'useful' is to train as a Junior Showmanship judge.

Some clubs are advocates for our trainee judges and some even go so far as to put a call out for judges needing appointments to progress. Other clubs tend to just use All Breeds judges whether they are from NZ or overseas. I encourage all judges who are on club committees to become advocates too. You will have a better knowledge of the judges who are coming through the training process. Experience is the key to competency. We need to collectively support this regulation and give our less experienced judges the opportunity to gain the necessary experience that will make them a great judge.

The NZDJA Board would like to wish all our members a very happy Christmas and the best wishes for 2023. 🐾

NZDJA National Board

Patroness:	Annette Buxton	Annette.buxton@outlook.com
	Betty Parker	betty.parker@outlook.co.nz
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Vice President:	Keith Brown	parkavon@xtra.co.nz
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Important Dates

31 December 2022	Cut off for completion of mandatory training
31 January 2023	Applications for promotion close