

## PRESS RELEASE

### **WSAVA Alerts to Emerging ‘Canine Welfare Crisis’ Caused by the Popularity of Short-Nosed Breeds**

#### **Launches an educational video campaign on breathing issues due to BOAS**

Veterinarians around the world are warning about an emerging canine welfare crisis caused by the rapidly increasing number of short-nosed (brachycephalic) dogs. These dogs can have exaggerated anatomical features that can seriously affect their health and well-being. The most concerning of the health issues they face is Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS).

The Hereditary Disease Committee (HDC) of the [World Small Animal Veterinary Association](https://www.wsava.org/) (WSAVA) has produced an educational video highlighting the problems that BOAS can cause in brachycephalic breeds, including French bulldogs, English bulldogs, and pugs. During the video, members of the WSAVA HDC and other experts explain how the appearance of short-nosed breeds has been affected by breeding for extreme and exaggerated anatomical conformation. While dogs which snore or pant are considered cute by some, the experts point out that these traits are not normal and that the dogs are, in fact, struggling to breathe. Many short-nosed dogs require surgery to survive and have a significantly shorter lifespan than other dogs.

Speaking during the video, Dr Peter Sandøe, Director of the Centre for Companion Animal Welfare at the University of Copenhagen, says: “With French bulldogs now the most popular breed in many countries and with English bulldogs and pugs also very popular, the number of affected dogs is increasing dramatically. Selective breeding for an exaggerated short nose has created dogs whose health, in many cases, is compromised for the sake of perceived ‘cuteness’. It is simply unethical to breed dogs which struggle to breathe.”

The WSAVA Hereditary Disease Committee is calling on all stakeholders – breeders, owners, veterinarians, media, regulators, and others – to work together to improve the welfare of these breeds going forward, and change perceptions of what ‘healthy’ looks like in these dogs.

It urges them to work together on health-focused breeding initiatives to produce dogs with less exaggerated anatomical features so that BOAS and other related health issues are not passed on. The selective breeding which caused these problems in the first place, can return these breeds to better respiratory health by selecting for more moderate anatomical conformation and for normal breathing. Many kennel clubs have instituted Respiratory Function Grading (RFG) to screen prospective breeding dogs against BOAS. If RFG screening is not available, prospective breeding dogs should be able to go on a brisk three-minute walk without laboring to breathe. If they cannot do this, they should not be used for breeding.

The need for a united approach is reinforced by WSAVA HDC member Dr Monique Megens, who contributes to the video explaining that brachycephalic dogs are bred - legally and illegally - around the world and transported across borders so a global approach is the only way to make progress.

The 17-minute video, available in several languages, also features contributions from:

- Dr Jerold Bell, Chair of the WSAVA HDC, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Tufts University, USA
- Dr Åke Hedhammar, WSAVA HDC member, Senior Professor in Internal Medicine at the University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden
- Dr Jane Ladlow, Clinical Lead of the BOAS Research Group, Cambridge University, UK

Dr Bell said: “Breeders did not purposefully select for dogs with impaired breathing but there is no doubt that breeding to create dogs with ever shorter muzzles has created serious health issues in these breeds.

“We hope our video will help educate breeders, owners, and all of those involved in or influencing the breeding and care of short-nosed dogs. We also hope it will give them useful advice on the steps they can take to help as we work together to resolve a serious welfare issue. All dogs deserve to live healthy lives. We must not let them down.”

The video is available here: [www.wsava.org/boas](http://www.wsava.org/boas)

The WSAVA represents more than 200,000 veterinarians worldwide through its 115 member associations and works to enhance standards of clinical care for companion animals. Its core activities include the development of WSAVA Global Guidelines in key areas of veterinary practice, including pain management, nutrition and vaccination, together with lobbying on important issues affecting companion animal care worldwide.

The WSAVA Hereditary Disease Committee aims to facilitate clinician diagnoses, treatment and control of hereditary diseases and genetic predispositions in dogs and cats, thereby improving the health of patients now and in future generations.

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