

His Majesty The King

Buckingham Palace
London SW1AA
United Kingdom

Himmelpforten, 2025-07-21

Your Majesty,

It is with the deepest respect that we address Your Majesty in your role as Patron of the Royal Kennel Club - a position uniquely aligned with your lifelong and globally admired commitment to the protection of animals, species, and the environment.

It is widely recognised that Your Majesty is deeply aware of the serious health issues now affecting not just a few, but many pedigree dog breeds. Your lifelong dedication to animal welfare, reflected in your patronage of both the British Veterinary Association and the Kennel Club, demonstrates your foresight and sincere concern for the well-being of animals.

In May 2024, you became Patron of the Kennel Club, assuming a role traditionally held by the monarch - a tradition that began in 1873 with the then Prince Edward. This patronage allows you to support and encourage important reforms without intervening directly in operational decisions.

We also acknowledge the recent initiatives by the Kennel Club, such as the "Health Standard" programme launched on 15 January 2025. As Patron of the Kennel Club, you are in a unique position to support such important reform initiatives. This programme, for the first time, categorises all available health tests into "Good Practice" and "Best Practice" categories, based on the evaluation of over 4,000 scientific publications and decades of health data.

Furthermore, we view the recent leadership transition at the Royal Kennel Club, following the long tenure of the previous chairman, as a potentially pivotal moment - an opportunity for a genuine paradigm shift. It is encouraging to see that influential voices within the Club are already championing profound change. For example, the new Chairman of the Kennel Club, Ian Seath, emphasises the need to prioritise health over appearance and affirms that the show ring "can and should be a powerful force for improving dog health." A clear endorsement of this direction from Your Majesty could decisively empower these forces for reform and pave the way for a new era of responsibility.

The scientific evidence, however, paints a sobering picture. The health problems observed in many dog breeds - particularly in brachycephalic breeds like French Bulldogs, Pugs, and English Bulldogs - are widespread, severe, and, in many cases, visibly worsening. These conditions not only cause immense suffering for the animals themselves but also emotional and financial burdens for their owners.

Although the Kennel Club has taken steps in the right direction, the measures introduced thus far fall far short of what would be required to prevent such suffering on the scale at which it continues to occur. The fundamental difference is that these initiatives are based largely on voluntary participation, whereas the Europe-wide trend is unmistakably moving towards legally binding and enforceable regulations that do not merely recommend, but guarantee, animal welfare.

The relationship, ethics, and morality of humanity's connection to our fellow creatures are undergoing a societal change, one which understandably gives greater consideration to the welfare of the individual animal than to the interest in preserving the customary appearance of breed populations. Responsible dog breeding must consistently face this responsibility.

The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, in particular, suffers from a tragic catalogue of hereditary diseases, including cranial malformations that are directly enshrined in the breed standard:

- **Syringomyelia (SM):** A devastating neurological condition where the skull is too small for the brain, leading to brain compression and obstruction of cerebrospinal fluid flow. This causes the formation of fluid-filled cavities in the spinal cord and results in chronic, neuropathic pain. Studies show that over 90% of Cavaliers have the predisposing skull malformation (Chiari-like malformation), and in some populations, nearly 50% suffer from SM itself.
- **Mitral Valve Disease (MVD):** A progressive, degenerative heart condition that inevitably leads to heart failure. MVD is the most common cause of premature death in the breed, with virtually 100% of dogs affected by the age of ten.

The sheer scale of this genetically entrenched suffering has prompted several countries to take decisive legal action. On 10 October 2023, the Supreme Court of Norway ruled that the continued breeding of purebred Cavalier King Charles Spaniels violates the country's Animal Welfare Act, citing the unacceptably high risk of passing on painful hereditary diseases. This landmark ruling has set a new international benchmark for animal welfare, a standard the United Kingdom, a nation that prides itself on its compassion for animals, is currently falling behind.

Several countries have already implemented or are preparing regulations to combat extreme breeding:

- **Norway:** Since 2022, the breeding of Cavalier King Charles Spaniels has been banned due to the high prevalence of Syringomyelia and other hereditary diseases.
- **Netherlands:** In 2014, the country banned the breeding of dogs with characteristics that impair their health or well-being.
- **Switzerland:** The Animal Welfare Act stipulates that animals used for breeding must be free from traits that cause suffering.
- **Germany and Austria:** Both countries have enshrined the concept of "Qualzucht" (torture breeding) in their animal welfare laws, which refers to breeding practices that lead to pain, suffering, or harm.

The European Union has also resolved to undertake comprehensive reforms to improve breeding standards for dogs and cats. The EU Regulation on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats, passed by the European Parliament on 19 June 2025, and now entering negotiations with the Council of the EU, will for the first time establish uniform standards for the breeding, housing, and handling of dogs and cats. The provisions include a ban on breeding animals with exaggerated conformational traits that compromise welfare, a ban on inbreeding, the introduction of minimum housing standards, and mandatory identification and registration.

Furthermore, the European Commission, with its "Platform on Animal Welfare," has created a central forum for dialogue and the exchange of scientific and technical knowledge to promote animal welfare standards throughout the Union. This platform has existed since 2017 and has been extended until 2025 to strengthen international cooperation in animal welfare. The participation of the United Kingdom in this important, cross-border initiative would send a strong signal and would strengthen international cooperation in animal welfare, rather than pursuing national, isolated solutions that risk turning the United Kingdom into a destination for those breeders wishing to evade stricter continental standards. This could not only undermine its reputation as a leading nation in animal welfare but also complicate the fight against the illegal puppy trade - a billion-euro industry that the new EU regulation specifically targets through strict, database-supported traceability.

Dog breeding and exhibitions are organised internationally. Stronger and more visible leadership from the Royal Kennel Club - under the esteemed patronage of Your Majesty - would have a profound global impact. It would restore international respect for the United Kingdom as a leading nation in animal welfare and could potentially avert future legal interventions, such as those seen in Norway.

We are, of course, aware that the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel is named after King Charles II. Yet it is precisely this symbolic connection that has compelled us to address our respectful appeal to Your Majesty. Today, the name „Charles“ - the name of the royal house - is inextricably linked not only with a charming companion dog but also with a scientifically documented and man-made legacy of suffering.

As a Specialist Veterinarian for Animal Welfare and Ethics and the Project Lead of the Qualzucht-Evidenz-Netzwerk (QUEN), I have unfortunately had to witness that dogs with clear, breed-related health problems are still being bred, exhibited, and awarded prizes. This underscores the urgent need for more effective measures. May I be permitted to extend our sincere apology for addressing Your Majesty in the form of an open letter. We do so only out of a deep and evidence-based concern for the welfare of each individual animal and in the belief that transparency can strengthen the impetus for change - never with the intention of crossing the bounds of courtesy or protocol.

In this spirit, we reverently hope that Your Majesty might consider granting this cause further, decisive support. We would be most deeply honoured if your patronage could help to usher in a new era of reform by encouraging the Royal Kennel Club to take bolder and more fundamental measures:

- **Supporting** a fundamental revision of breed standards and breeding guidelines that prioritises functional health, vitality, and quality of life over extreme aesthetic traits.
- **Encouraging** the formation of an international consortium that brings together experts to counteract extreme breeding practices through concrete, measurable, and science-based breeding standards, thereby restoring the United Kingdom's historic leadership role in animal welfare.
- **Initiating** a public dialogue on the ethical question of whether a breed so closely associated with the royal name should continue to represent such profound, man-made suffering.

With the deepest and most sincere respect for Your Majesty's tireless dedication to the welfare of all living beings,



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Dr. jur. Christoph Maisack
Retired Judge at the District Court
Chairman of the German Juridical Society for Animal Protection Law

Enclosures:

- QUEN-Fact Sheet nr. 34 Dog Breed Cavalier King Charles Spaniel
<https://qualzucht-datenbank.eu/fact-sheet-dog-breed-cavalier-king-charles-spaniel/>
- QUEN informational brochure