



C B V - A

COMITATO BIOETICO  
PER LA VETERINARIA  
E L'AGROALIMENTARE

## STATEMENT ON UNHEALTHY PET BREEDS<sup>1</sup>

The Holiday season has traditionally led many families or single persons to follow a widespread desire to welcome a pet in their homes and, more deeply, among their affections. This decision should be encouraged because of the beneficial effects it has on animals and on people themselves and for the symbolic effect of reaching out to nature that derives from it. The act of taking care of another, distant phylogenetically and challenging, changes us, and for the better. It is also for this reason that the decision to do it must be conscious, informed, thoughtful and reasonable.

The relationship with the animal that joins our small social community entails, in fact, not insignificant duties regarding the availability of food, playgrounds and rest areas, health management and care in the event of illness, and the related costs. It also implies a constant effort of relationship, due diligence to ensure that the animal does not suffer, the imperative duty not to abandon it, or to mutilate it to comply with senseless aesthetic reasons or race standards.

The Veterinary and Agri-Food Bioethics Committee does not enter in this document into the ethical discussion on ways by which the animal is taken in, whether by adoption of animals abandoned or seized by the authorities, which is highly desirable, or following the purchase of a specimen, usually a puppy, through legal and certified channels. The issue is controversial and complex, even conceptually, and deserves a wider discussion.

**However, the Committee would like to reiterate here the ethical obligation not to buy pets of breeds that are intrinsically unhealthy and thus suffering, namely those with congenital or genetically vulnerable deficits for severe diseases.**

The animal we are adopting has a moral value in itself as a sentient being, and must be bred, sold and chosen by us, bearing in mind that it can never be a futile human interest that prevails, such as the attraction for a captivating morphology, or for particularly graceful or exotic characteristics, when these are intrinsically associated with *genetic mistreatment*.

There is a moral duty to help animals who, because of the genetic selection of desirable traits in terms of features, colours, absence of hair or its excessive length, conformation of the muzzle or ears, size, gait, behaviour, have been condemned to be intrinsically defective, such as flawed toys whose deficit is not visible and sometimes even cause for appeal itself. A dog or a cat with exasperated physical characters are often sick, they feel pain, discomfort, stress, just because of those characters that we find funny or pleasant because extravagant, refined or glamorous. The most effective way to help them, however, consists not in taking care of them and treating them when and as necessary, but simply in not giving birth to animals with such characteristics, or rather not purchasing them and therefore making them less interesting for the puppy market because they are no longer desired products. **Otherwise, although innocent of the damage their**

---

<sup>1</sup> Unanimously adopted by the Veterinary and Agri-Food Bioethics Committee (December 13, 2019).

**genetics cause, we would be *guilty* of perpetuating that damage because of our consumer choices.**

The superficiality with which we sometimes express our preferences when buying an animal can no longer be justified by lack of information, given the wide availability of knowledge, explanations and lists of suffering breeds available, for instance, on the web. Nor can the farming of these animals be justified any longer on the grounds of the need to safeguard the market and related jobs, decades after the problem was initially raised (and therefore since the breeders could have started to redepoly their activities). To this practice, moreover, it is possible to apply the provisions of the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals (1987), ratified in Italy by Law 201/2010 (Ratification and implementation of the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals). Indeed, article 5 of the Convention states that “Any person who selects a pet animal for breeding shall be responsible for having regard to the anatomical, physiological and behavioural characteristics which are likely to put at risk the health and welfare of either the offspring or the female parent.”

**For this reason, on the occasion of the forthcoming Holidays, the Committee urges not to purchase puppies of unhealthy breeds, or adult specimens of the same, and stigmatizes the behaviour of those who still do it, especially if a possible public role brings it to the attention of all as a social model.**

**Moreover, the Committee hopes that the political institutions will make it compulsory to provide a detailed information sheet on the problem of unhealthy breeds at the time of their sale, so that there can be no misunderstandings about the impact of the gesture that the buyer is about to undertake.**