The BSAVA is an influential organization on the national policy-making stage and with policy as one of the current BSAVA President’s themes for the presidency, Head of BSAVA Policy, Adrienne Conroy, provides an insight into some of the BSAVA’s recent policy activities.

The past year has seen an unprecedented level of government consultations, calls for evidence and parliamentary inquiries. The BSAVA has responded to a variety of those which related to companion animals, many in conjunction with the BVA. Topics have been broad ranging from licensing and third party sales through to responsible pet ownership and the use of electronic shock collars. Responses have also been provided to both European and RCVS consultations and BVA Position Statements. In all, well over 30 responses or contributions have been provided ensuring that the BSAVA views are represented and can influence policy which affects national and international issues of relevance to our sector of the profession (Box 1).

### Box 1: Consultations and briefings: some of the issues BSAVA responded or contributed to during 2017–18

#### Westminster activities
- Defra’s Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) Regulations 2018
- Canine Feline Sector Group (CFSG)/Defra Guidance documents to support licensing regulations:
  - Breeding Guidance
  - Boarding Establishments Guidance
  - Day Care Guidance
  - Vending/Sale Guidance
  - Animal Exhibits Guidance
- Defra’s Call for Evidence on the proposed ban of Third Party Sales
- The use of electronic training collars (England)
- Dangerous Dogs and Breed Specific Legislation – Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (Efra Com) Inquiry and request for evidence

#### Scottish Government activities
- Rehoming Activities and Animal Sanctuaries Registration and Licensing proposals
- Pet Rabbit Welfare Guidance
- Proposed Pet Shop Licensing Bill
- Breeding and Ownership of Dogs, Private Members Bill (Scottish Parliament)
- Petition PE1674 on preservation of the Scottish wild cat and the control of cat population
The BSAVA is represented on many groups which discuss and agree strategies that influence some of the topical issues impacting on the health and welfare of pets.

The Prime Minister’s announcement in December 2017 supported the drive for change reflected in the legislative changes and the Guidelines for the related animal licensing activities. The BSAVA was thanked for its valuable input, with Lord Gardiner thanking CFSG for driving forward standards to improve health and welfare in the companion animal sector. For BSAVA members who have an interest in this area either through their own work or that of their clients, the resulting Regulations and supporting Guidance can be accessed via https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/9780111165485.

BSAVA also attended the annual CFSG stakeholder event where all sector groups which participate in CFSG were represented and which considered some of the priority areas for CFSG to focus on moving forward. Subsequently the CFSG Strategy for 2018 has been agreed for the next 12–18 months and working groups have been formed to take this work forward.

Brachycephalic Working Group

The focus of the Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) is on improving the health and welfare of brachycephalic breeds. The BWG has been working on several initiatives including:

- New Defra legislation i.e. Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) Regulations 2018
- Guidance to support the legislation covering licensing and standards of premises involved in companion animal activities. These include breeding establishments, places of sale, day care and boarding facilities
- Codes of Practice that provide practical advice and guidance to relevant stakeholders.

CFSG reports to Defra through the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England (AHWBE). The AHWBE is the principle source of departmental advice to Defra ministers on strategic health and welfare matters relating to all kept animals in England. The Board also has strategic oversight of Defra policy in England in relation to the public health implications of those diseases that fall within Defra’s remit.

Defra’s timescale for input into the legislation and completion of the Guidance was extremely tight during the last quarter of 2017, with the expectation for the majority of the work to be completed by the end of 2017 so the parliamentary process could begin early in 2018.

The BSAVA provided input into eight of the nine Guidance documents. Final comments on the legislation and guidance were provided by CFSG to Defra in January 2018 and the parliamentary process began later that month. The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 transited through Parliament and became law on 1 October 2018 with Defra Guidance and Codes of Practice (CoPs) to support the legislation being issued beforehand. Given the challenging timescale for delivery, this was a huge achievement for CFSG.

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Brachycephalic Working Group

The focus of the Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) is on improving the health and welfare of
brachycephalic dog breeds. The BWG agrees shared actions and aims to ensure greater overall progress and outcomes for the health and well-being of brachycephalic dog breeds. Goals include highlighting the importance of generating evidence for, and awareness of, the related health problems and addressing their causes and effects. Desired outcomes include a reduction in the number of dogs affected by BOAS and other brachycephaly-related health problems. The BWG works collaboratively towards ensuring existing and potential owners of brachycephalic dog breeds are better-informed and aware of the health challenges associated with these breeds.

Members of the BWG include representatives from the Kennel Club, dog breed health co-ordinators, academic researchers, animal welfare charities and veterinary associations including the BSAVA. Activities have been broad and varied over the past year.

- To ensure the Group maximizes its influence, BWG members penned an open letter asking companies to refrain from using brachycephalic breeds on products and in advertising materials. This obtained media coverage in over 40 articles in the national and specialist press in the UK and Ireland resulting in an overall audience reach of over 20 million. This raised the profile of the BWG resulting in some high profile companies reviewing their policies and no longer intending to feature brachycephalic breeds. European and global veterinary associations also expressed their interest in BWG’s activities and a desire to take action to support similar work and initiatives in their own countries.
- In advance of the launch of the Disney movie *Patrick*, where the star of the film was a Pug, the BSAVA, along with other BWG members engaged with Disney to produce communication materials intended for use at the time of release of the film. These highlighted the importance of responsible dog acquisition, ownership and the care of specific dog breeds. With commitments of support from Disney, a BWG position statement was prepared for inclusion on the BWG website which outlined the BWG’s position on brachycephalic dog conformation.
- To support the BWG Framework agreement, the BSAVA included preparations for a debate on brachycephalism at BSAVA Congress (available in the BSAVA Library – https://www.bsavalibrary.com/content/journals/10.22233/20412495.0618.12).
- The Big Issues stream at BSAVA Congress featured a session on the Illegal Puppy Trade which highlighted the puppy import trade in particular, the exponential rise in imports of brachycephalic breeds (available in the BSAVA Library – https://www.bsavalibrary.com/content/journals/10.22233/20412495.0818.8). The session additionally provided useful tips and guidance to support vets when taking action to address the issues relating to this trade.
- Input was also provided into the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) Consultation on ‘Breeding Healthy Dogs’ that shaped FVE policy, supported recommendations and also proposed actions regarding the supply and demand of brachycephalic breeds.

The BSAVA support for BWG has been well-received and the Association’s input has been recognized for the value it brings to the Group and its aims.

Dog Health Group

The BSAVA is also represented on The Dog Health Group (DHO), a Kennel Club-led group made up of vets, geneticists, breeders, researchers and Kennel Club representatives. Its remit is to develop strategy for the Kennel Club’s work on matters relating to canine health. It does so by means of coordination and monitoring of related work; supervising some of the Kennel Club’s public campaigns, and advising on health schemes, the Assured Breeder Scheme (ABS) requirements and other breeding strategies.

Animal Welfare Network Wales

BSAVA Policy supports some of the activities undertaken by the Animal Welfare Network for Wales (AWNW), an independent initiative set up to bring together all organizations in Wales where their activities relate to animal welfare. The aim is to facilitate effective communication and activities between these organizations and input into Welsh Government policies relating to companion animals. The work of the Group is similar to that of the CFSG and members include veterinary, animal welfare and farming organizations. BSAVA Policy ensures
succession of the BSAVA Welsh Region representative and both contributes to and coordinates BSAVA’s input to consultations.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate strategy on antimicrobial resistance
As activity on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) continues to build, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) is keen to ensure communication, collaboration and cooperation between cross-sector groups is managed so that any good work is recognized, promoted and shared and also, that duplication is avoided. Part of their focus is on developing work on AMR for companion animal sectors. BSAVA Policy contributed to VMD’s future AMR strategy which aims to achieve a long term sustainable culture-change in relation to AMR. VMD is also aiming to continue to develop the One Health approach by working with medics, pharmacists and nurses.

BSAVA Policy Groups
Given the ongoing need for responses to consultations and the formulation of policies whether for the UK, Europe or globally, the BSAVA has the potential to impact on many areas across society where vets are involved. To facilitate membership engagement and leverage wider BSAVA expertise in providing responses or contributions, policy groups with allocated topics were set up and members invited to express an interest in joining a Group. Group members have already begun to add value by sharing their expertise on a range of policies. By involving members in these activities it offers them the opportunity to understand how the BSAVA engages with external organizations and influences decisions that matter, making a difference not just to our profession but to related sectors. Not least it ensures the veterinary viewpoint is considered and resulting policies are both effective and pragmatic. This new approach to policy-making for the BSAVA has so far engendered enthusiastic input from involved members and the aim is for it to evolve and provide a valuable resource that influences national initiatives affecting our profession.

Events and external engagement
A range of additional external meetings and events were attended by BSAVA Policy including meetings on the illegal puppy trade attended by representatives from both the House of Commons and Lords, veterinary organizations, international transporters, central government and enforcement authorities. Other events focused on a broad spectrum of topics, from the impact of Brexit on the future availability of medicines and the potential impact on animal health through to meetings on improving national disease surveillance. The latter was highlighted to BSAVA members asking for their participation in related surveys which resulted in an exceptional response rate. This added value to the final recommendations which ultimately were presented to government.

Meetings with other organizations also included BVA and veterinary associations, the RCVS, government, and both sector and trade organizations. BSAVA Policy also considers requests from NGOs to work in collaboration with them on projects or initiatives. As a result, BSAVA supported the Bella Moss Foundation in producing guidelines for the selection of specific disinfectants appropriate for use in companion animal practice.

To launch the proposed ban on Third Party Sales, Defra’s Secretary of State Michael Gove hosted an event at No. 10 Downing Street where he emphasized the government’s commitment to improving animal welfare relating to the sale of companion animals, also known as ‘Lucy’s Law’. Defra also hosted an annual external stakeholder event which showcased the range of stakeholders Defra engages with and the breadth of the activities covered, from animal welfare and the environment to food production and flood defences. In addition, BSAVA attended the AGM for the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England (AHWBE) where, with Brexit on the horizon, the Chair of AHWBE reminded attendees that the exceptional demands on stakeholders’ resources in making preparations for Brexit continued unabated and would do so well into the future.

To sum up...
BSAVA policy is broad-ranging as it keeps pace with an often rapidly and ever changing landscape. It highlights the influence BSAVA and its membership can have improving animal health and welfare not just in the UK but farther afield. Not least, it ensures the voice of companion animal vets is heard and that their views and input are recognized for the better of the Profession and society as a whole.

BSAVA Policy Groups

■ Professional regulation
■ Cross-sector veterinary topics
■ Medicines and AMR
■ Research and Education
■ Licensing of Premises
■ Brexit
■ Animal Welfare and Ethics
■ Non-traditional companion animals
■ Specific ad-hoc topics
■ Scottish Region topics and initiatives
■ Welsh Region topics and initiatives