

## The Rise and Rise and Rise of the Backyard Breeder

Taken from a Blog by Elizabeth Saunders – Wednesday June 14, 2015

<http://www.belgianshepherdrescue.com.au/blog/the-rise-and-rise-and-rise-of-the-backyard-breeders>

In a forum the other day I followed closely as one user asked just what exactly constitutes a “backyard breeder” (BYB). I had seen the question asked many times in similar forums and waited for the usual onslaught of comments about BYBs vs. Kennel Club (KC) Registered Breeders. The same arguments were relayed over and over and it occurred to me that perhaps there's not a clear and convincing guide out there for the general public. For those of us who work in the animal rescue and welfare industry the issue of BYBs is a no-brainer, but for the average Joe who is just looking for a low cost, friendly pet it might not be so obvious.

### “What Does BYB Actually Mean?”

By now we have all seen the shocking images of puppy farms published by the RSPCA, PETA, Animals Australia and other welfare organisations. There's no doubt that these puppy mills are a large part of the BYB pandemic. The problem is that when you think of backyard breeders you might not be picturing your friends Bob and Sue down the street - whose wandering Staffy has just popped out 8 adorable little puppies - and you ought to be.

According to Wikipedia (aka Gen Y's Holy Scripture), ‘A Backyard Breeder is a general term, often considered derogatory, used to describe people who breed animals, often without registration.’

### “But Bob and Sue are Nice People who Love Their Dog, What's so Bad About Them Breeding?”

It turns out quite a lot actually.

How about for starters that according to the RSPCA there has been more than 14 million cats and dogs destroyed in Australia since World War II, due to irresponsible breeding and ownership. Or perhaps the fact that on average a female dog loses years off her life due to the stress of pregnancy. Spaying and neutering also reduces the risk of breast cancer and uterine infections in females and testicular cancer in male dogs. Female dogs in heat are known to wander, as do males when they sense a female in heat. So that furry, lifeless body you see on the side of the road? There's a good chance that dog is there because they've wandered during, or due to, a reproductive cycle.

It's not all sunshine and new life when whelping a litter of puppies either. When you couple a novice breeder with an inexperienced and/or young mother dog the chances for complications and death during birth skyrocket. Emergency C-sections, haemorrhaging, pyometra, mastitis, stillbirth, and placenta retention are all issues most longtime registered breeders have had to deal with at one time or another. The emergency veterinary treatment required to treat these conditions usually costs upwards of \$2000. These are thousands of dollars that most BYBs don't have and sadly the dogs will often end up having treatment withheld, dumped at a shelter or worse still, put to sleep.

So ask yourself, if Bob and Sue really loved their dog, why would they endanger her life so unnecessarily?

### How The Internet Age Lined BYB Pockets

One might assume that with 80% of all Australian households now having access to all of the answers to all of the questions Google, that perhaps potential BYBs would be more educated and discouraged from breeding their dogs. Then again, one might also be completely and utterly wrong...

At time of publishing there were over 44,000 listings for live animals on gumtree.com.au. That's a whole lot of BYB dogs. This of course doesn't even take in to consideration the other two largest pet trading sites: Trading Post and Facebook. For all except Trading Post it's free to post an ad and more people than ever before are seeing advertisements for BYB dogs. One city-specific “buy and sell pets” group has more than 20,000 members! Gone are the days of the humble newspaper ad or hand written sign on the front fence, enter the era of mass-scale backyard breeding. Livestock is quickly turning in to one of the internet's most profitable commodities. The measures in place by sites like Gumtree simply aren't enough, and I have seen first hand the moderators of Pets For Sale groups on Facebook blatantly state that they don't believe dogs and cats should have to be vaccinated, microchipped or desexed.

**The Part Where I Talk About KC Breeders not Being the Devil Spawn and am Likely Publicly Vilified for It...**

Time and time again I hear BYBs and their supporters harp on about “paying for a piece of paper”. The paper of course being the certified pedigree that accompanies the sale of a KC registered dog. Pedigrees are worth far more than the paper they’re printed on, in fact, you’re usually getting proof of thousands of dollars’ worth of health testing, professional experience and all KC registered breeders first have to undertake a comprehensive examination to even be granted registration! **No other breeding registration body in Australia offers the same surety.** Once registered, KC breeders are bound to the following code of conduct, and answer not only to their registration body, but to their peers.

Specifically the Australian National KC states that breeders must:

- Breed only to improve the quality of their chosen breed
- Not breed specifically for commercial gains
- Breed only an adult female dog (called a Dam)
- Not breed more than twice in any 18 month period
- Not breed more than 6 litters over the life of a Dam
- Breed only with other registered breeders and approved dogs, who are also bound by the same code of conduct
- Take measures to reduce the incidence of hereditary diseases
- Not sell a puppy under 8 weeks of age
- Screen all potential owners to ensure they will be giving the dog the best environment and lifestyle possible
- Remain in contact and offer advice and assistance to owners of their dogs
- Provide records of vaccinations and medical care and ensure their dogs are in the best possible state of health
- Not allow their dogs to be sold to any country that is known to trade in dog meat

In addition to these strict ethical policies, many breeders nowadays have taken to DNA testing their dogs for the 334 known hereditary diseases, and breeds such as the German Shepherd must be screened for hip and elbow dysplasia. So that pedigree you receive with your dog shows more than just fancy titles, rather generations worth of breeder expertise and health testing.

In contrast, the only legal requirement of BYBs (in most States and Territories) is that the animal must be microchipped.

Of course KC breeders do have their own issues. With a great reputation comes a great need to protect it. I have heard stories about KC registered breeders mating dogs with known genetic issues, euthanising puppies with recessive genes to protect the name of their kennel and acting against the KC code of conduct to which they are bound. There is no denying that this goes on, but compared with the high incidence of the same, and worse, issues amongst BYBs, a registered breeder is still a safer option if you must get yourself a puppy as the level of accountability is much higher.

### **Myth Busting Minute**

1) “My dog has the right to experience being a mother!”

No, that’s called anthropomorphism, you need to read more about it here.

2) “Having a litter will mature my dog.”

If your dog is too energetic they probably need exercise and mental stimulation. If your dog is disobedient they probably need positive reinforcement obedience training. If your dog is aggressive or anxious they probably need to see a behaviourist. Forcing your dog to whelp a litter to mature them in some way is borderline animal cruelty.

3) “Desexing causes health issues.”

There’s some merit to the idea that only very early desexing can cause endocrinological disorders, these have been most commonly found in puppies desexed before 6 months of age. There is no excuse for an adult dog not to be desexed. In fact, desexing makes your dog less susceptible to breast, uterine and testicular cancer.

4) “I don’t want my dog to lose it’s manhood.”

Your dog is not self-aware. He isn’t about to have an identity crisis. After the initial recovery period he will have forgotten all about it.

5) “It’s just a pet, I don’t need a pedigree dog. They’re too expensive.”

Okay. Fine. But please don’t complain about the vet bills and possible early death of your dog when they shows clinical signs of some of the [334 known diseases caused by genetic anomalies](#).

6) "If everyone stops breeding the average person won't be able to afford a family pet."

Let's be reasonable. I do not live in some nonsensical planet where I believe for one second that 100% of all backyard breeding will cease. It will always happen, and there is nothing I can do about that. The point is that [over 200,000 homeless dogs and cats in Australia are killed each year in overcrowded shelters](#). There's a heck of a lot of average people who could've adopted those animals and adoption fees start as low as \$50.

7) "I want my child to experience the miracle of life."

This one is just bizarre, and it always surprises me how often I hear it. Whelping and then moving a litter on only teaches children that animals are disposable. The real miracle is going to your local animal shelter and saving a life.

### **How You Can Help Reduce the Number of Unwanted Pets**

- Simple: stop buying puppies from unregistered breeders. There are numerous strategies and ideas for reducing the number of BYB dogs but basic economics teaches us the idea of supply and demand. If enough people rethink their decisions to buy from an unregistered breeder or pet shop, and instead either adopt from a rescue organisation or purchase from a registered breeder, then the demand for BYB dogs is drastically reduced.
- Desex your pets and support organisations that desex homeless animals. Speak to your vet about the best age to desex your animals. Organisations like The Animal Welfare League also offer low cost desexing. If you can't afford to desex your dog, how are you going to deal with a litter of puppies or the impound fees when your male dog is caught wandering after a female?
- Refuse to accept backyard breeding. Education and a lack of social acceptance are also easy ways to reduce the number of BYB who may be well-intentioned, but are still contributing to the wider issue. If someone you know is thinking of breeding their dogs, and is doing so without registration, educate them. Take them to a shelter and show them the effect their litter will have on the system. Make it known that you don't agree with their choices - you'd be surprised how far a little peer pressure can go.
- Call for more legislation. A great idea put forward by [Animals Australia](#) is that of a centralised database for all registered breeders, whether they are part of a KC or not. The system would call for mandatory welfare checks, a code of conduct and desexing of all pet puppies and kittens before sale.

### **Surely We've Reached Saturation, Somebody Please Tell Me We've Reached Saturation**

When will we as a society reach boiling point? Off the top of my head I can count no less than 10 local shelters and rescues here in Queensland who are all beyond capacity. The welcome change to 'no-kill' and 'pro-life' shelters means less animals are being killed, but also that more rescues are not able to accept new cases. What happens to the dogs who have been refused admittance to a shelter? Many end up being given away online, with owners who don't possess the resources to screen potential new families. For the traditionally "aggressive" breeds (American Staffy, German Shepherd, Dobermann, Rottweiler etc.) it's often used as a fighting or bait dog. For the dogs who aren't desexed, many will end up with unscrupulous breeders and spend the rest of their days pregnant and nursing in less than ideal conditions.

The rise and rise of the backyard bred dog, which has resulted in the unnecessary death of more than 14 million dogs and cats, is cause for great concern. It's up to every one of us to educate, to refuse to accept this as the norm, to desex our pets and to call for greater legal powers to shut down unregistered breeding operations.

Oh, and can somebody please pass this along to Bob and Sue? I heard they took a trip to Bali with the money they made from their puppies...