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**MINUTES OF THE Agility Liaison Council MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 22 February 2024 AT 10.00AM VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

**PRESENT**

Ms J Bale South East/East Anglia

Mrs E Bostock South East/East Anglia

Mr A Dornford-Smith Northern Ireland

Mrs J Gardner Midlands

Mr J Hallam South/South West

Mrs S Hawkswell Scotland

Ms T Davies North East

Miss R Sargent North West

Mr M Tait South/South West

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Miss D Deuchar Head of Canine Activities

Miss C McHardy Manager – Education, Training, and

Working Dog Activities Team

Ms R Mansfield Committee Secretary – Working Dog Activities Team

Ms H Byrne-Ingle Administrator – Working Dog Activities

**NOTE: any recommendations made by the Agility Liaison Council are subject to review by the Activities Committee and The Kennel Club Board and will not come into effect unless and until Board approval has been confirmed.**

**IN THE CHAIR MRS S HAWKSWELL**

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1. Apologies had been received from Ms D Tedds, Mr M Hallam, Mrs E Laing-Kay and Mrs S Robinson.

2. Mrs Hawkswell reminded the Council that the items on the day’s agenda were discussion items and therefore only required agreement as to whether to take them forward or not and by whom.

**item 11. discussion items**

*(Continued from the meeting held on 18 January 2024)*

 Progression to the Championship Agility Class Final

3. Mr Tait wished the Council to discuss changing the championship class regulations so that the winner of each qualifying round automatically qualified for the final, providing they competed in both rounds.

4. The Council was of the opinion that the suggestion had support, though there was some confusion about how many competitors there would be in the final. It was clarified that the two winners would compete in the final in addition to the maximum of twenty already accounted for in the regulations.

5. With that clarification the Council requested that Mr Tait bring a proposal back to the next meeting.

 Securing the Tunnel

6. Mr Tait wished the Council to discuss introducing regulations which would determine the minimum coverage by sandbags and straps on the tunnel.

7. The Council agreed that more guidance may be needed on the correct way to secure the tunnel, however it was felt that research would be needed to determine what the guidance should say. It was appreciated that research would be difficult to undertake without putting dogs in potentially unsafe situations, however, it was agreed that research would be the best way forward if a suitable method could be managed.

8. The Council agreed that the matter should be referred to the Equipment Panel for review.

 Start and finish gates

9. Mr Tait wished the Council to discuss increasing the distance at which the timing gate may be placed from the tyre, when it was used as the last obstacle, to 40cm. This would be to reduce the risk of damage to the timing equipment.

10. Mr Tait clarified that the issue was mostly related to the finish gate placement, as the tyre could swing in such a way, when opened, that it could hit the timing gate, whereas that was not the case at the start.

11. A brief discussion occurred as to the feeling around the regions, and it was agreed that the majority felt that it would be preferable to prevent the tyre being used as the last obstacle on a course. However, there was a concern that this would further restrict judges on course design.

12. It was also noted that the current regulations stated that saloon-style tyres must have the ability to swing open to 90-140 degrees, however it did not prevent them swinging open further.

13. The Council considered that it would be useful to send the item to the Equipment Panel for consideration as to the best way to solve the problem to ensure all solutions were considered before opting to prevent the obstacle being used at the finish.

14. The Equipment Panel agreed to discuss the issue and bring potential solutions back to the next meeting.

 *(Mr J Hallam left at this point.)*

 Review of the use of the brush fence (H(1)(B)3.d), water jump (H(1)(B)3.g) and wishing well (H(1)(B)3.h)

15. Ms G Lott, an individual, wished the Council to discuss whether the above pieces of equipment were still safe and fit for function in an agility course.

16. A discussion occurred, and it was felt that the majority of people were in favour of removing the pieces of equipment, however there was a feeling that the obstacles were outdated and could be made safer by reviewing them, rather than removing them completely.

17. It was noted that the pieces of equipment were not seen often in course design, though it could be due to safety concerns over their construction. There was a concern whether removing the brush fence from use would have an impact on the use of fillers for hurdles.

18. A suggestion was made that the Equipment Panel review the pieces of equipment to determine whether there was a way to update them to make them safer, with a view to removing them if that were not possible. It would also need to ensure that any changes did not impact the use of fillers on hurdles.

19. The Equipment Panel agreed to consider the topic and feedback at a later meeting.

 Judges Database

20. Ms G Lott, an individual, wished the Council to discuss the creation of a judge’s database to aid with judge selection by show organisers.

21. It was acknowledged that the topic of a judge’s database had been discussed at Council many times and the reasons for it not being available had been explained by the office.

22. However, the office was able to provide an update on progress on the matter. The Judges Education Program (JEP) for breed show judges was planned to be launched in 2024, which would include a database of judges along with their judging level based on the JEP. It had been queried whether the same development could be used for activities judges, however it was only being developed for breed show judges at this time.

23. However, it did mean that once the JEP was complete there would be the opportunity to build something similar for activities judges and the creation of judging levels would be discussed by the Activities Judges Sub Group.

24. The Council was pleased that there was progress on the topic and wished it to be reflected in the minutes that it had the full support of the Council, and it should be a priority.

25. Ms Sargent would feedback to Ms Lott regarding her discussion item.

 Online Database

26. Ms G Lott, an individual, wished the Council to discuss the creation of an online database for dog results.

27. The Council noted that this topic had also been discussed previously and had not been able to be progressed due to resourcing.

28. The office provided an update that an option of working in liaison with show processors was being investigated, however it was in the very early stages with just the initial conversations having been had.

29. The Council was pleased that further discussions were happening and wished to express its support for the progression of the topic. Ms Sargent would feedback to Ms Lott regarding her discussion item.

 Grade progression timescale

30. Ms G Lott wished the Council to discuss whether the grade progression time should be reduced from 25 days to 10 days as grade changes could be automatically forwarded to show processors to reallocate classes entered.

31. A query was raised as to whether this discussion item was dependent on there being an online database, as discussed above. It was clarified that while an online database would make a lot of things possible, the change to the 25-day grade change rule was not wholly dependent on it.

32. A brief discussion occurred where it was decided that as the Governance Panel was undertaking a review of the grading system, that it would be appropriate to consider this topic alongside that. It was acknowledged that the timeframe should be reviewed but the impact on show processors needed to be taken into account, as well as trying to make it as clear as possible.

33. The Governance Panel agreed to consider the matter during the grading review.

 Minimum class size for grade progression

34. Ms G Lott wished the Council to discuss wins eligible for progression having a minimum entry of dogs, so that classes with fewer than ‘x’ dogs should count for ‘half wins’.

35. A brief discussion occurred during which the views of the various regions were given, and it did not appear that there was any support for the suggestion at this time.

36. It was noted that it was possible that the grading review would help to alleviate the issue.

 IKC grade equivalence

37. Mr Dornford-Smith, on behalf of the Northern Ireland region, wished the Council to discuss the situation regarding dog grade equivalence between the Irish Kennel Club (and other countries) and UK Kennel Club grades in order to clarify the situation.

38. Mr Dornford-Smith explained that the current situation allowed competitors from the Republic of Ireland, where there were not many Irish Kennel Club shows, to compete in Northern Ireland and use wins gained at UK Kennel Club licensed shows to progress up the grades in the ROI. This was due to the IKC regulations allowing UK Kennel Club wins to count for progression in the IKC grades.

39. The IKC required fewer wins to move up the grades than the UK Kennel Club which meant that competitors from the ROI were achieving wins at UK Kennel Club shows and using these to move up the IKC grades without competing in the ROI. They would then move up the grades at UK Kennel Club shows using their IKC grade.

 40. Due to The Kennel Club’s overseas awards policy, ROI dogs competed in the UK at the grade they were in their home country. This meant that ROI dogs were progressing through the grades much more quickly than if they were just competing in the UK.

 *(Mr J Hallam re-joined the meeting)*

41. It was clarified that the overseas awards policy had been in place for a while and it was felt that the issue arose due to the change in the grade progression regulations in the UK which were not adopted by the IKC, thereby confusing the matter.

42. Mr Dornford-Smith proposed a solution which would allow agility clubs to choose whether they would be able to prevent dogs competing at their home country grade and therefore would need to compete in the lowest grade depending on what wins had been gained under UK Kennel Club regulations.

43. There was some discussion on this suggestion and it was queried whether it was fair to allow a dog to potentially have to compete in grade 1 at a show on one weekend and then compete at a higher grade at another show on the next weekend. Mr Dornford-Smith explained that it was equivalent to the situation in Northern Ireland currently due to the grade disparity and it would not be a common occurrence.

44. It was agreed that Mr Dornford-Smith’s suggestion was unlikely to be accepted by the Activities Committee as it was not felt to be fair and therefore should not be progressed. However, it was agreed that the situation needed to be resolved and as it was the Committee’s policy document that it should be put to Committee for a review.

45. The Council was in agreement that it wished to ask the Activities Committee to review its overseas awards policy to help resolve the issue. A suggestion was made that the policy could be changed to remove the recognition of IKC grades, and it was agreed that this could be an option and should be suggested to the Activities Committee.

46. The Council requested for the overseas awards policy be published on The Kennel Club website as it had become apparent during the discussion that many people were confused about what grade overseas competitors should compete in.

47. The office agreed to publish the policy on the website once the Committee had reviewed it.

**ITEM 12. strategy document**

48. The Council considered the current strategy document and believed that it was not currently actionable or realistic and needed a major review.

49. A query was raised as to how much influence the Council had on the items on the strategy document and it was clarified that the document was the Council’s responsibility and should help guide the Council’s work by providing guidance on decisions and what should be taking priority in discussions.

50. It was noted that a new term of office for the Council was due to start at the beginning of 2025 and whether it would not be appropriate to update the strategy when the Council membership may change significantly. It was clarified that the document was regularly reviewed, and it was a way for the outgoing council to inform the incoming council of what its priorities had been. It was also noted that it was very rare for a council to completely replace its entire membership during elections.

51. A suggestion was made that the strategy should be informed by the higher levels of administration such as The Kennel Club Board and the Activities Committee as to how those entities wished agility to progress. It was explained by the office that the intent of the document was for the discipline to be informed by the grassroots as to how it should progress and not to be dictated to by those outside the discipline.

52. It was noted that The Kennel Club had several strategic aims, which were high level objectives to help direct the work of the various Committees, Councils and Working Parties of The Kennel Club and those should be taken into account when considering the strategy for agility.

53. The Council agreed to work on the document outside of the meeting but requested the office to provide any strategy documents from the various Committees and Working Parties that might affect the Council’s work to help in its review.

54. The office agreed to investigate this and provide what it could to help the Council.

**ITEM 13.** **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

55. There were no items of any other business.

**ITEM 14.** **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

56. The Council’s next meeting would take place at The Kennel Club in Clarges Street on 4 July 2024.

57. Any items for the agenda must be submitted by 5 April 2024.

The meeting closed at 11.50am.

**MRS S HAWKSWELL**

**Vice Chair**

**THE KENNEL CLUB’S MISSION STATEMENT**

**‘The Kennel Club is the national body which exists to promote the general improvement, health and well-being of all dogs through responsible breeding and ownership*’***