

**Government of Flanders**

Strategy, international policy and animal welfare division

Koning Albert II-laan 20 box 8

1000 BRUSSELS

T 02 553 15 08

[www.omgevingvlaanderen.be](http://www.omgevingvlaanderen.be)

**Flemish for Animal Welfare Council - OPINION 28/11/2018**

**Ban on the breeding of cat breeds with  
osteochondrodysplasia such as ‘Fold’ cats**

In line with the Flemish Animal Welfare Council, the Brussels Animal Welfare Council advocates a complete ban on the breeding and sale of cat breeds with the hereditary (congenital) disorder osteochondrodysplasia.

The increasingly popular ‘Scottish Fold’ cat breed has a characteristic appearance with slightly short ears that fold sharply forwards and downwards, flat against their round heads. This appearance is caused by a genetic mutation that influences the development of cartilage. Unfortunately, this genetic defect not only causes cartilage abnormality in the ear, but also in the rest of the skeleton.

The scientific name for this hereditary (congenital) abnormality is osteochondrodysplasia. The tail vertebrae thicken and become stiff, the front and hind legs can stand crooked (twisted) and thicken, and the joints may develop abnormally (Aydin et al. 2015<sup>1</sup>, Langley-Hobbs 2012<sup>2</sup>, Vella et al. 1999<sup>3</sup>, and Chang et al. 2007<sup>4</sup> and Matthews et al. 1995<sup>5</sup> in UFAW 2011<sup>6</sup>). The disease is progressive and incurable. The symptoms associated

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<sup>1</sup> Aydin, D., Altunatmaz, K., Olgün Erdikmen, D., Özer, K., Durmus, D., Avanus, K. (2015). Hereditary

Osteochondrodysplasia in Scottish Fold Cats. *Kafkas Universitesi Veteriner Fakultesi Dergisi* 21 (4), 463-469

<sup>2</sup> Langley-Hobbs, S. (2012). Musculoskeletal oddities in the cat: overview of some curious causes of lameness. *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* 14,31-42.

<sup>3</sup> Vella, C.M., Shelton, L.M., McGonagle, J.J., Stanglein, T.W. (1999). *Robinson’s Genetics for Cat Breeders & Veterinarians* (4th edition).

<sup>4</sup> Chang, J., Jung, J., Oh, S., Lee, S., Kim, G., Kim, H., Kweon, O., Yoon, J., Choi, M. (2007). Osteochondrodysplasia in three Scottish fold cats. *Journal of Veterinary Science* 8, 307–309.

<sup>5</sup> Mathews, K.G., Koblik, P.D., Knoeckel, M.J., Pool, R.R., Fyfe J.C. (1995). Resolution of lameness associated with Scottish fold osteodystrophy following bilateral ostectomies and pantarsal arthrodeses: a case report. *Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association* 31, 280–288.

<sup>6</sup> UFAW (Universities Federation for Animal Welfare). (2011). <https://www.ufaw.org.uk/cats/scottish-foldosteochondrodysplasia#clinical>. Consulted 14/10/2018.

with this condition are similar to those of arthritis, whereby the joints are chronically inflamed. Moving becomes difficult and painful, and in severe cases the cats become crippled.

The long-haired variant of the Scottish Fold is called the Highland Fold. Another variant is the 'Scottish Straight' whose ears do not fold due to a reduced penetrance of the 'Fold' gene.

These latter cats can pass on the 'Fold' gene mutation and thus also the risk of osteochondrodysplasia. The fact that the natural mutation of the 'Fold' gene which causes osteochondrodysplasia is dominant, is an important disparity from other hereditary genetic disorders in cats and dogs.

In the 1970s, several pedigree cats associations in the United States recognised the Scottish Fold as a breed. Due to its health problems, an increasing number of (international) breeders' associations took a stand against the breeding of the Scottish Fold and cat breeds suffering from osteochondrodysplasia or a genetic carrier of the defect were not recognised nor authorised for breeding. Other associations are less categorical and only prohibit the cross breeding of 'Fold cats' with folded ears.

Although the health problems inherent in the 'Scottish Fold' have gained prominence in recent years through media attention in countries including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium, there is as yet no legal ban on the breeding of the 'Scottish Fold' or 'Highland Fold' in the aforementioned countries.

In Belgium, Article 19 § 2 of the Royal Order (RO) of 27 April 2007 provides for a potential ban on the breeding of pedigrees with congenital defects by accredited breeders. This article enables the minister responsible for animal welfare to formulate a list of animals (breeds) that have a hereditary condition, for which a breeding ban is justified on the grounds of animal welfare. Article 27 of the same order offers the potential for a general ban, including for private individuals.

In order to support the breeding ban, the Council also recommends a ban on exhibiting and advertising with a view to the sale of these breeds.

*This advisory text is based on the Brussels Council for Animal Welfare 'Ban on the breeding of "Fold" cats due to congenital osteochondrodysplasia' opinion of 21/06/2018.*