



Air Transport of Cats

Introduction

Recent deaths of dogs being transported by air has resulted in a major review of the processes and procedures for transporting cats, dogs and rabbits. In particular, the transport of breeds considered to be **brachycephalic** has been suspended until the review is completed. This paper looks at the issues for the transportation of cats, but the same principles may apply to other species.

This is a combined proposal from the three major National Pedigree Cat Registering Bodies in Australia, Australian Cat Federation, Coordinating Cat Council of Australia, Australian National Cats and the World Cat Congress. We provide this information to assist the committee reviewing the procedures for the transport of cats. Understanding the cost implications for changes to procedures we have provided a range of options for the physical handling of cats at all airports.

We all have the welfare of all cats as a priority, whether they are well loved, very valuable show cats or family pets, often they are both. Our associations are happy to work with the AVA, RSPCA or other nominated organisations to ensure that animals can be transported with minimum risk. We don't believe it is necessary to ban transport of all brachycephalic breeds.

Most importantly we do not endorse the current lists of cats labelled as Brachycephalic by the various airlines and feel that this requires some scientific rigor to be applied to this fundamental fact for the review. There is a significant difference between brachycephalic cats and those who have Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome. The latter are the cats at high risk during air travel. The majority of brachycephalic cats are not at greater risk than any other cat providing they have good air flow in the travel crate.

A more pertinent assessment would be if any of the breeds has **Brachycephalic airway obstructive syndrome (BOAS)** which leads to severe respiratory distress. This can be as a result of

- Stenotic nares
- Elongated soft palate
- Hypoplastic trachea (reduced trachea size)
- Short/irregular nasal turbinates.

This list of brachycephalic cats (from Wikipedia) is the list of Cats currently considered brachycephalic by Qantas,

- British Shorthair
- Burmese
- Exotic Shorthair
- Himalayan (not a separate breed but pattern of Persian)
- Persian
- Scottish Fold

There is no information on who compiled this list. Presumably it is based on the American types of these breeds of cats which is often more extreme than the types of the same breeds of cats in other countries. There is a noticeable difference in the degree of brachycephaly in Australian bred show cats than in some overseas countries where the head type is far more extreme.

Virgin Australia has a more comprehensive list which appears to be the same as that used by Jetpets. Once again there is no information as to how this list was compiled but includes breeds that have never been considered to be brachycephalic by our associations.

We acknowledge that breeding of pedigree cats that are not registered with our associations does occur and that in some instances this results in more extreme degrees of brachycephaly – the recommendations below will detect these cats and allow their welfare to be protected.

We consider that only Persian (including the Himalayan pattern) and Exotic Shorthair to be brachycephalic.

1. Brachycephaly

The **cephalic index** of a vertebrate is the ratio between the width (side to side) and length (front to back) of its cranium (skull). This ratio does not concern the muzzle or face, and thus is distinct from the *craniofacial ratio*, which compares the size of the cranium to the length of the muzzle. The cephalic index is used to classify animals into three groups:

Cephalic indices are grouped as in the following table:

Females	Males	Scientific term	Meaning	Alternative term
< 75	< 75.9	<i>dolichocephalic</i>	'long-headed'	
75 to 83	76 to 81	<i>mesaticephalic</i>	'medium-headed'	<i>mesocephalic; mesocranial</i>
> 83	> 81.1	<i>brachycephalic</i>	'short-headed'	<i>brachycranial</i>

Recommendation 1

The veterinarians from our associations consider that only the Persian (including Himalayan pattern) and Exotics are brachycephalic breeds and most likely to experience BOAS.

Recommendation 2

Airlines work with the Australian Veterinary Association to develop a process and form to assess cats for **Brachycephalic airway obstructive syndrome (BOAS)**

Recommendation 3

Brachycephalic cats to have a completed BOAS Assessment Form from the owner's veterinarian issued within 10 days of travel stating the suitability of a brachycephalic cat to fly and that they **do not** have Brachycephalic Airway Obstructive Syndrome. If there is any doubt eg cats that are not registered with a pedigree body the BOAS assessment should be completed

Recommendation 4

Cats declared to be positive for BOAS **are not accepted for travel.**

2. Cage type and size

For animals considered to be brachycephalic (but not positive for BOAS) the primary concern is for unobstructed air flow. The use of fluffy, bulky bedding in the travel crate is not appropriate as the cat can get caught up in the bedding and obstruct airflow. Covers should also not be placed over the crate as this also reduces the airflow.

Type of cage

Current recommendations for airline approved crates are endorsed

Size of cage

The PP pet carrier needs to have enough space for the cat to stand up in and turn around while standing, sit erect and be able to lie down in a natural position. The current airline calculations for crate size are endorsed for non brachycephalic cats.

Recommendation 5

A sensible precaution to protect airflow would be to require all adult cats of brachycephalic breeds to travel in a minimum crate of PP30 dimensions with minimal bedding

3. Use of Tranquilisers when flying cats

There is a very real risk of an adverse event if a tranquiliser is used when flying a cat as they could over sedate.

From the Veterinary Information Network

- Acepromazine can produce heavily sedated to totally flat out cats or the opposite behaviour of hyperactivity.
- Tranquilisers to some extent also affect temperature regulation which may be an issue if conditions are too hot or too cold.
- Heavy sedation can be a hypothermia risk.
- The recommendation is to use no tranquilisers.
- However, if the owner's veterinarian recommends tranquilisation for the cat then the veterinarian's exact dosing recommendation must be followed to avoid sedation.

Recommendation 6

No cats should be tranquilised for travel unless specifically prescribed by a veterinarian with an accompanying certificate.

4. Airline Loading Practices

The following are recommended to reduce the effects of heat and cold plus stress on the cats being in a busy, noisy environment on the tarmac. Most importantly is the need to recognise that customers treat their animals as family members, not freight.

- Animals to be loaded just before scheduled take off and removed if expected delay longer than 1 hr or no air flow to hold during delay.
- A separate motorised trailer capable of sheltering animals from inclement weather to be used to transfer animals from the holding facility to the plane.. The ideal would be to have animals removed in a temperature-controlled van by experienced animal handlers.
- Animals placed in a special area on board the aircraft with adequate airflow and temperature regulation
- Animals to be removed from the hold and taken to cargo as soon as the hold is opened and not be held on the tarmac with luggage.
- A separate motorised trailer capable of sheltering animals from inclement weather to be used to immediately transfer animals to the terminal. The Ideal would be to have animals removed in a temperature-controlled van by experienced animal handlers.
- Special training for baggage staff in animal welfare.
- Animals to be picked up and dropped off at the terminal if travelling with owners rather than freight. This will reduce the time and improve convenience to customers

5. Practical booking considerations

We suggest that the following advice be provided to customers before they book their cat to travel. It should be emphasised that although these considerations may not be ideal for the customer it will greatly increase the safety of their cats

- Try to book a non-stop flight and avoid plane changes when possible.
- When possible, avoid flying during busy holidays.
- In warm weather, choose early morning or late evening flights.
- In colder weather, choose mid-day flights.
- Reconfirm flight arrangements the day before you leave to minimize the chance of unexpected changes.
- It is usually recommended for short flights that cats fly on an empty stomach to reduce the possibility of vomiting and inhaling vomit. However the cat's age, dietary needs and size and the time and distance of the flight should all be taken into consideration. Veterinary advice should be sought if in any doubt
- Consider the normal temperature range and humidity the animal lives in at time of booking and the normal temperature at the destination. Book flight times to minimise the risk of heat or cold to the animal. High humidity may make respiration more difficult
- If temperatures and / or humidity are excessively high or low on the day of transport rebook the travel of your pet for another day or time.

Recommendation 7

Airlines introduce rules that allow them to refuse an animal for travel if the climate conditions are too severe. There should be no charge for rebooking the animal to fly at a more suitable time.

The AVA should provide recommendations on the maximum variations in ambient temperatures that is safe. Australia and overseas destinations have a wide range of conditions and what may be suitable

for one animal would be dangerous for another. For instance, an animal living in the Kimberley or far north of Queensland would tolerate higher variation in temperature than an animal living in Tasmania

It should not be overlooked that there will be cats who are borderline BOAS who must be transported either for medical treatment or because the owners are relocating. These animals need the transportation that provides the least risk and a long road journey may be much higher risk than the air transport. In these cases we recommend that the airline will need to assess each case individually and liaison with the treating veterinarian will be required. At times there will be a risk that the owner and airline need to accept and try to mitigate, but this will not be the norm.

Authors

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