

## **Report of the WAFDAL President**

*Münchsgrün, August 29, 2025*

When we met in Salzburg just over four years ago, the situation was quite challenging. The COVID pandemic still had a firm grip on us—fortunately, at least in Austria, a meeting including a small show was possible. WAFDAL had been inactive for years and needed to be revived.

A lot has happened since that meeting. We "legalized" the organization by adopting new statutes and registering it in the Austrian association register. Since 2021, private individuals have also been able to become members. Initially, much had to be organized, and the main goal was to relaunch WAFDAL.

In the area of health, we first addressed the topic of DCM (dilated cardiomyopathy), a heart disease considered to be partially hereditary and which can occur sporadically in Dalmatians. An online seminar with Pascale Smets was organized.

Furthermore, we jointly developed breeding recommendations, which include proposals on how to approach breeding projects and strategies for maintaining genetic diversity.

We became collaborative partners with IPFD DogWellNet, the largest database on canine health. There, a large collection of information about Dalmatians can be found.

In the area of public relations, several projects were initiated. A flyer was designed and is available for download. The WAFDAL Facebook group serves as a means of communication, including with non-members, and now has over 1,100 members. Regular posts inform about seminars, shows, and various topics of interest.

In 2023, the WAFDAL meeting and show were organized by our members from the Netherlands and Belgium. Over 100 dogs from 7 countries were registered, which showed us that we were on the right path and that WAFDAL was being noticed again. The board remained largely unchanged.

Even after the event in the Netherlands, there was still plenty to do. The website needed to be modernized, which was successfully done thanks to our webmaster. Since March 2024, the new website has been online, and suggestions for improvements and updates have been implemented quickly.

With the "Dalmatian Round Table," we introduced a new communication format that allows breed club chairpersons and breeders from across Europe to converse informally. We have successfully held three round tables so far, each with participants from all over Europe.

Unfortunately, we also had to deal with unpleasant political issues. Especially in German-speaking countries, dog breeding is increasingly under attack by animal rights activists, which is increasingly reflected in planned regulations and laws. Dog shows and breeding are being more heavily regulated or could even become nearly impossible in the future. Neighboring countries are already seeing legal consequences from these discussions, and the first bans have been issued. In cooperation with the affected member clubs, we were able to report some small successes and took a clear stance on the issue of "torture breeding." Still, this conflict seems to be only at the beginning.

Part of this problem lies in the public perception of our breed. Dalmatians are still commonly reported to have deafness rates of up to 30%, portrayed as allergy-prone dogs with urate stone issues and hereditary diseases. As an example, I confronted a so-called scientific article from a Swiss newspaper that spread particularly bold false claims about our breed. Despite weeks of discussions with the author and editor-in-chief, there were no corrections made, which is why the case is now pending before the Swiss Press Council.

At the suggestion of a member, we started our latest project: the WAFDAL Handling Academy. Here, we aim to provide a list of professional handlers in the future, who can be evaluated through client feedback. This will allow exhibitors to find competent handlers when needed. Secondly, we plan to create a knowledge database on shows, focusing particularly on anatomy and the breed standard. Thirdly, we aim to offer handling courses when needed.

We have gained three new club members, although we initially lost some as well. The number of private members is now almost 50.

The summary of our last four years is therefore quite positive. WAFDAL not only survived—it is once again being recognized. Our goal of a new start has been largely achieved. However, this is only the beginning. Much has been started, but not yet completed. Our public relations work needs to become more professional; we lack support from our members and from people outside WAFDAL. Illnesses and other reasons have made communication within the board challenging at times, and we have all—including myself—made mistakes. It is therefore time to involve new people and take the next step. If a new board can be found today, one that can convince the majority of members and lead WAFDAL in the same spirit while bringing fresh energy into the future, I would be happy to hand over the organization into trustworthy hands. If my involvement is still desired and needed, I am of course always happy to help.

The goals of WAFDAL should, of course, remain the same, no matter who is on the board. The health of the breed must always be the top priority, and democratic communication with members and non-members must always be sought. Many health-related projects lie ahead, such as the issue of dwarfism or the international harmonization of tests. Breeding strategies should be a major topic—only by preserving genetic diversity, purebred breeding can survive in the medium term. Opportunities for discussion and continuing education must be created here.

Secondly, public relations efforts must be intensified. WAFDAL must grow and involve more individuals and clubs. Visibility must increase externally, and WAFDAL should become a point of contact for journalists. This requires the presentation of fact-based articles, but also a focus on promoting the breed's image.

Thirdly, it will increasingly be necessary to become politically active. The hostility toward purebred dog breeding is increasing. Both national clubs and associations, as well as international organizations, must find ways to counter this.

With this in mind, I wish the future board a sure hand, lots of energy, perseverance, and above all, strong support from all of us. Without support, the WAFDAL project will have no future, despite all efforts. I am convinced that, especially in today's times, an international organization is more important than ever.