



## Dominant Blue Eyes: A Call for Responsible Breeding

**Dominant Blue Eyes (DBE) is a captivating trait becoming popular, especially in Maine Coons, characterised by striking blue eyes in cats that do not carry the traditional blue-eyed gene. While undeniably beautiful, DBE in this breed has become increasingly prevalent in the last few years, raising concerns among feline geneticists and breeders worldwide.**

**The Maine Coon is a very popular breed in FIFe, since many years the more widely bred, reaching now 25% of the total of FIFe issued pedigrees.**

The MCO Breed Council has a strong opinion on DBE:

*"MCO BC resolutely recommends for all time not to use any DBE cats in breeding programs. MCO BC recommend that genetic testing for the PAX3 gene in Maine Coons with blue eyes is strongly encouraged to identify potential risks early such as deafness and Waardenburg Syndrome. To promote responsible breeding and supporting FIFe's commitment to feline health and welfare MCO BC also recommends to take precautions working with lines with DBE cat in the past".*



Recent studies in fact, including work by renowned feline geneticist Dr. Leslie Lyons, have linked DBE in Maine Coons to several health issues: "our findings strongly suggest *PAX3:c.937C>T (OMIA:001688-9685)* as the most likely candidate variant for the DBE, deafness, and minimal white spotting in the Maine Coon," states Dr. Lyons.

These findings underscore the importance of responsible breeding practices to minimise the potential health implications of this trait.

Recognising these concerns, upon suggestion of FIFe Health and Welfare Commission, FIFe has implemented a significant change, effective January 1, 2025. DBE testing will now be included in the recommended health panel for all Maine Coons with blue eyes.

This proactive measure aims to increase awareness, by educating breeders about the potential health risks associated with DBE, and promote responsible breeding, by encouraging the selection of breeding cats with minimal health risks, including those related to DBE, in order to contribute to the long-term well-being of the Maine Coon breed.

The decision to include DBE testing in the recommended panel reflects a growing consensus within the global feline community. At the last World Cat Congress, this concern on DBE was widely discussed by



representatives from cat federations worldwide.

Why testing only Maine Coons, if the trait is found also in other breeds? At the moment, the only available commercial test is the Maine Coon breed-related mutation. The Health and Welfare Commission will monitor the evolution of other available commercial tests on other breeds and act accordingly.

Meanwhile, breeders are actors in protecting the breeds: the other involved breed where DBE is quite in trend is the British, and FIFe Breed Council is taking a strong proactive position.

*“The FIFe British BC is following the development on DBE in British very closely and with some concerns. Unfortunately currently there is not a valid test available like in MCO and there are multiple genes found causing DBE in British.*

*The BC will continue to closely and actively follow research, take actions when required and inform breeders when more information or tests will become available. We highly recommend to take precautions working with lines with DBE cats and never breed DBE to DBE cats.*

*We would also like to emphasise that DBE is not recognised in British and over the last 100 years, the residual white colour (09) has always been and will continue to be extremely undesirable in BSH/BLH. Systematic selection was carried out to eliminate this so that solid-coloured cats are in fact solid-coloured. Adding genes (DBE) to the gene pool that ‘carry’ this feature is an extremely undesired addition”.*



FIFe strongly emphasises the importance of responsible breeding practices and encourages all breeders to prioritise the health and welfare of their cats.

While research into DBE continues, it is crucial for breeders to play an active role in mitigating potential health risks. By incorporating DBE testing into their breeding programs, breeders can make informed decisions about their breeding stock and contribute to the overall health and vitality of the breeds.

*FIFe Health & Welfare Commission*