

TAIL DOCKING OF DOGS

Policy

The NZVA opposes the prophylactic and cosmetic docking of dogs' tails, and supports docking for medical or surgical reasons only.

Explanation

The NZVA policy on canine tail docking is in line with its policy (3b) that opposes surgical alterations to the natural state of animals unless they are demonstrably necessary for the welfare of the animals concerned.

The NZVA is unaware of any credible studies that demonstrate that the welfare of dogs is compromised by being left undocked, and finds there is insufficient evidence that if dogs of the traditionally docked breeds were left undocked they would experience a greater number of tail injuries than dogs of the traditionally undocked breeds. A recent study (Diesel et al 2010) concluded that approximately 500 dogs would need to be docked in order to prevent one tail injury.

In addition, there are studies that show that atrophy and degeneration of the tail and pelvic muscles result in an increased risk of faecal incontinence, perineal hernia and possible urinary incontinence. The formation of a traumatic neuroma may result in chronic neuropathic pain. There is also evidence from other species that while younger animals may have a higher pain threshold, early painful stimuli may result in a greater sensitivity to pain as the animal ages.

The NZVA believes, then, that docking constitutes an unnecessary surgical alteration with subsequent animal welfare compromise, rather than any clear benefit to the animal.

The European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals prohibits surgical operations for non-curative purposes (see below). An increasing number of countries have placed restrictions on canine tail docking, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Australia, Finland and Denmark, while others including Cyprus, Greece, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Austria have ratified the Convention mentioned above.

The NZVA would support primary legislation prohibiting docking of dogs' tails except where required for medical or surgical reasons.

Addendum

The European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals, Article 10, states the following on surgical operations:

“Surgical operations for the purpose of modifying the appearance of a pet animal or for other non-curative purposes shall be prohibited and, in particular: the docking of tails; the cropping of ears; devocalisation; de-clawing and de-fanging.

Exceptions to these prohibitions shall be permitted only: if a veterinarian considers non-curative procedures necessary either for veterinary medical reasons or for the benefit of any particular animal; or to prevent reproduction.”

The accompanying explanatory report states:

“The article has been worded so as to place the emphasis on the prohibition of surgical interventions which are mainly carried out for aesthetic reasons or for the personal convenience of the owner and/or the breeder.”

References

Animal Welfare Act 1999

Animal Welfare (Dogs) Code of Welfare (2010) (<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/files/regs/animal-welfare/req/codes/dogs/dogs-code-of-welfare.pdf>)

Animal Welfare (Dogs) Code of Welfare Report (<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/files/regs/animal-welfare/req/codes/dogs/dogs-code-of-welfare-report.pdf>)

Bennett PC, Perini E. Tail docking in dogs: a review of the issues. *Australian Veterinary Journal* 81, 208-218, 2003

Diesel G, Pfeiffer D, Crispin S, Brodbelt D. Risk factors for tail injuries in dogs in Great Britain. *Veterinary Record* 166, 812-7, 2010

Veterinary Council of New Zealand Code of Professional Conduct 2007