Information on dog tail docking provided for the Animal Welfare Division

A review of the scientific aspects and veterinary opinions relating to tail docking in dogs

Summary

This paper briefly reviews docking in farm species as a basis for comparison with the historical, anatomical, behavioural, and current views on tail docking in dogs in the UK. Several aspects of pain in dogs relevant to tail docking are described as are current veterinary attitudes to the procedure.

1. Introduction

1.1. Docking is the term describing the shortening of an animal's tail by amputation; the removal of all/part of the tail. It is possible to carry it out in cattle and calves, sheep and lambs, pigs and piglets, puppies and dogs, and in horses.

1.2. It is currently and routinely practised in UK agriculture only in lambs and less so in piglets. In the UK it is prohibited in horses (even docked horses from other countries may not be landed in the UK without specific permission), cattle and calves, and generally in older or adult farmed or companion animals unless, following the specific intervention of a veterinary surgeon, such a surgical operation under anaesthetic is required in cases of physical injury or disease for the wellbeing of an individual animal, where such injury or disease cannot be treated or repaired without surgical amputation.

2. Docking in dairy cattle

2.1. This practice originated in New Zealand. It is currently practised in adult cattle New Zealand, Australia, USA and Canada whilst docking in calves is allowed in Ireland and Australia.

2.2. Field grazing animals produce looser faeces and docking is alleged to be a hygienic measure in reducing the somatic cell count as well as mastitis and to reduce the faecal contamination of milk (Barnett *et al* 1999). Despite extensive investigative studies in Canada, researchers have been unable to substantiate these alleged benefits (CVMA 2002). There are concerns that docked cows' ability to use their tail to deter flies is compromised (Hemsworth *et al* 1995, Petrie 1994) and observations have also been made of behavioural changes resulting from tail docking (Clark 2002). There are similar concerns for chronic conditions that may result in infection, pain (Petrie 1994), neuroma formation (Barnett *et al* 1999) and phantom pain (CVMA,2002). Differences in diet can affect faecal consistency and thus more research is required to determine the benefits, if any, to dairy cattle.(Clark 2000). Some opinion states that it is a move to improve the comfort and convenience of milkers rather than dairy cows (CVMA, 2002; Barnett et al 1999). Professional veterinary and public opinions in Australia and New Zealand indicate strong feelings against this practice.

3. Docking in sheep

3.1. Adult ewes of mountain breeds (eg. Scottish Blackface) have long undocked tails so that the udder is protected from chilling and possibly from mastitis in bad weather. Tail shaking in mountain breeds on poorer low quality grazing often occurs at defaecation to spread the usually well-formed faecal pellets. However, sheep reared on lush lowland pastures produce softer, sometimes liquid faeces which can accumulate around the perineal area of rectum, tail and upper hind limbs; this invites fly strike and subsequent myiasis (infestation with maggots which eat the tissues beneath the skin). Tail docking in such circumstances is acknowledged as a preventive hygienic procedure which does contribute to the potential welfare of such sheep. Similarly, in lambs born on the same type of pasture/grazing tail docking is also carried out.

3.2. The common methods of docking lambs' tails using rubber rings, Burdizzo forceps, cutting with a knife/snippers or cautery iron, have all aroused significant welfare concerns. Evidence for distress following application of rubber rings has been reported (Shutt et al 1988, Mellor and Murray 1989). Neuroma formation (disorganised nerve regrowth) (French and Morgan 1992) has also been noted in association with irregular innervation and was taken to suggest that increased sensitivity or chronic pain might be present for some significant time following docking. Some may consider the observation that tail docking in lambs has been done traditionally not to be an acceptable answer for allowing its continuation. Considerable data on pain in farm animals has been reported from MAFF sponsored studies (Molony and Kent 1997).

4. Docking in piglets

4.1. Tail biting in pigs reflects the natural curiosity of the species which investigates almost all objects by either foraging and rooting behaviour with the snout or a tentative chewing with the mouth, or both. Although the cause(s) are probably multifactorial it is commonplace with intensive pig farming practices in which animals are crowded together with no or minimal distractions to occupy their innate behaviour. It is accepted that where changes to husbandry have not resolved the problem then docking is a pre-emptive action to obviate not only the welfare considerations associated with tail biting but also the potentially serious damage to the carcass that can follow it.

4.2. Routine tail-docking in piglets is prohibited in EU law by the Pigs Directive (91/630/EEC) which has been implemented in the UK by the Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994. Exceptions are allowed, however, where there is on-farm evidence that tail biting has occurred as a result of failure to dock.

4.3. Docking is done by the breeder/farmer within the first few days after birth without anaesthetic. Neuromas (disorganised nerve regeneration) and regressive peripheral nerves suggesting increased sensitivity have been reported after docking (Simonsen *et al* 1991), but no behavioural studies have been conducted.

4.4. The current level of docking at 75-80% could be construed as a reflection of the inappropriate management systems currently in place in the pig industry and that the problem should be solved with more humane farming methods. However, tail biting

behaviour does occur in pigs kept in apparently ideal conditions confirming that the habit is complex in its origins.

5. Docking in dogs

5.1. Background in the UK

5.1.1. Docking is carried out in the UK on new born (neonatal) pups of certain breeds, such as spaniels, poodles and terriers. These pups are docked ostensibly to prevent injury to the tail in later, usually adult, life, or to improve hygiene by preventing faecal fouling with subsequent risk of infection or fly-strike. This type of docking is called 'prophylactic' or non-therapeutic docking. It is also described by some as 'cosmetic' docking, as it results in the dog conforming to a currently accepted breed standard. The procedure may be performed only by a veterinary surgeon. It has been illegal for lay-people to perform this procedure since 1993 under the Veterinary Surgeons Act.
Some docking of adult dogs may also occur for clinical veterinary reasons usually relating to tail injuries from accidental trapping tails in doors etc. Such operations are also done by a veterinary surgeon, but in an adult dog anaesthetic is required.

5.2. Anatomical information

5.2.1. The tail is not a limb but is an appendage; it is the distal section of the spinal column and comprises 20 (6-23)caudal or coccygeal vertebrae, muscle, nerves and blood vessels. The muscular structure and activity are an integral part of the normal bodily shape and function, especially in the perineal region. The insertion of the left and right sides of the *rectococcygeus* onto the 5^{th} and 6^{th} coccygeal vertebrae serves to support, anchor and stabilise the anal canal and the rectum, preventing them from being pulled cranially by a peristaltic wave. The contracting *rectococcygeus* can move the anal canal and rectum caudally to evacuate faecal material (Miller 1969). Similarly, the *levator ani* muscle helps to contain the contents of the pelvic cavity, moves the tail laterally and cranially, presses the tail against the anus and external genitalia, compresses the rectum and in altering the angle between the 6^{th} and 7^{th} vertebrae, also aids in defaecation.

It is suggested that removal of the tail in an immature puppy may lead to improper development of these muscles (Canfield 1986) and even if in a mature dog, the reduced support for the rectum and anus can lead to rectal dilatation or sacculation and faecal incontinence. Certainly some breeds such as the Old English sheepdog and Doberman Pinschers are know to show urinary incontinence (Holt and Thrusfield 1993) whilst brachycephalic breeds show a predisposition to perineal herniation (Burrows and Ellison 1989), sequelae associated with post tail-docking and other conditions. A relationship has also been suggested between tail docking and submissive urinary incontinence in puppies (Holt and Thrusfield 1993).

5.2.2. The tail starts at the root where it joins the sacral region and the insertion is the junction of the tail butt to the croup. This has many variations such that separate breeds of dog carry their tail at a different angle to others – low in Cocker Spaniels for example, high in Afghan, Borzoi and Saluki hounds, and there are many different

terms to describe the particular carriage or set of a dog's tail according to the breed; natural Schipperke tails can be small stubs, curled like a Keeshond's or held out like a German Shepherd's (Alsatian), (Spira 2002).

5.3. Behavioural and social aspects in dogs with tails

5.3.1. Posture together with vocalisation are means by which both many species of animals, including dogs and humans, demonstrate their individual and collective attitudes and relationships. The behaviour of dogs, including posture and vocalisation, has been extensively studied (Hafez 1969, Fox 1969,1979) .

5.3.2. The tail in a dog is used as a counter-balance in various locomotory activities. The tail muscles not only support the muscles of the croup and hind quarters generally but also stabilise the longer length of the vertebral column (Wansborough1996).

5.3.4. Dogs displaying an erect posture and raised slowly wagging tail , often accompanied with low growls, are trying to intimidate by portraying themselves as larger and more powerful, thereby establishing a dominance over other dogs or similarly, to warn off other approaching/encroaching animals including humans. Such physical display may change to one of submission in which the tail is lowered and curves low between the hind legs with rapid wagging, to normal acceptance of equals with rapid tail wagging or alternatively, continuing to show the raised rigid tail with even further aggressive moves with possibly fighting and death (Darwin 1872/1965, Lindsay 2000). Coloured tips on the tails of some breeds make such physical signals easier to read between both individuals and social packs.

5.3.5. In all cases the tail is a very important indicator of the agonistic mood of the dog(s) concerned and is easily seen from some distance away (Lorenz 1952) Thus a dog with a tail is able to express its emotional state, assertion of social status, acceptance of a subordinate or equal position, or willingness to fight. It has been suggested that the absence of a tail may, in some instances, predispose a dog to unwarranted aggression (Wansborough 1996) and this particular viewpoint merits investigation.

5.4. Historical comments on tail docking in dogs

5.4.1. It is suggested that evidence obtained and verified in the Near East (Reed, 1959), that dogs share with goats, the distinction of being the earliest domesticated animals. Dogs offer the greater number of varieties, some 500 breeds, than any other species of domestic animals (Hafez 1969) and the large differences in physical size, behaviour and temperament notwithstanding, there has been considerable and successful interbreeding. As an even closer association with man developed in early times it is possible than those animals with vicious temperaments were killed by man, thus beginning the first deliberate process of selection for unwanted attributes.

5.4.2. There are several reasons for which dogs were docked in early times – to prevent rabies, strengthen the back and increase running speed, prevent bites when ratting, fighting or baiting. Docking of tails on farmers' or drovers' dogs used for herding and driving cattle and sheep originated in early Georgian times in England as it exempted the owner from a tax levied upon working dogs with tails. Many other

types or breeds of dogs were also similarly docked to avoid this tax and although the tax was repealed in 1796 the habit of docking has persisted until modern times. Short-tailed dogs around that period were called curs and gave rise to the term curtailing, meaning to cut short.

It is important to note that analgesia, anaesthetics, surgery and veterinary science itself were quite undeveloped at that time, and it is reasonable to infer that considerable pain and suffering were experienced by the docking process.

5.4.3. Thomas Berwick, the naturalist and engraver, noted in 1811 that some dogs were whelped with short tails as if cut off and called them self-tailed dogs. Scientists accept that although the natural development of any species is a continuous process, selective breeding is required for success in obtaining certain desired traits or characteristics, both physical and behavioural. Thus, stumpy-tailed cattle dogs in Australia being descended from those famous English cattle dogs called *Smithfield heelers* seen in and around Smithfield meat market in earlier times were transported to Australia with their owners They have been cross-bred using short-tailed dogs of that type by mating with dingos to give litters either without any tails or with short stumpy tails called *Timmin's biters* after their keenness to bite (STCD). Pups are born with tiny stumpy tails which may not exceed four inches in length to conform to the breed standard. Thus, careful breeding for the physical attribute of a short tail can be achieved without compromising other facets of the breed, in particular, its ability to work hard at herding.

Australian stumpy-tail cattle dogs

5.5. Current comments on tail docking in dogs

5.5.1 The Anti-Docking Alliance (2000) state that some 52 breeds of dog in the UK are still being currently docked. Those in favour of docking state that it prevents tail injury in later life, particularly in working dogs. However, it must be accepted that although many of today's breeds are historically descended from working dogs, in actual fact true working animals constitute only a very small portion of dogs within the UK and yet even for dogs of those breeds serving as pet/companion animals, docking continues. It is also both improper and unsubstantiated to suggest that all puppies in any litter, working or non-working, will suffer tail injury in later life and thus should all be docked soon after birth as a precautionary measure. A seven year survey conducted by the University of Edinburgh Veterinary School showed insufficient evidence of statistical significance to suggest a positive association between tail injuries and undocked tails; tail docking could not be recommended as a

preventive measure in any comparable predominantly urban population (Tucker 1994).
Not all injured tails require surgical amputation and basic first aid would probably be adequate in most cases.

5.5.2. Arguably the most obvious undocked working dogs in the UK are foxhounds and sheepdogs which pursue an extremely active and physically demanding life in which they hunt and work through all kinds of different landscape, including woodland and scrub. There appears to be no evidence, scientific or anecdotal, that they suffer damaged tails.

English foxhound – full tail, carried high

Border collie – full tail, carried low

5.5.3. Those who shoot and use spaniels as gun dogs insist the risk of serious tail damage is high due to the rapid wagging of the tail by an active dog together with the type of dense cover , scrub and brambles, through which the dogs work. Yet the pendant ears of spaniels should surely be liable to similar damage in the undergrowth and the long hair of their coats pick up burrs, twigs etc in the same way, and yet there are no comments on injuries or damage sustained on ears and body generally (ref: Section 9.5 and 9.6).

5.5.4. Spaniels (Sussex, Cocker, Springer, Clumber, Field, Brittany, Boykin), sheepdogs, Old English (bob-tail) and terriers (Norfolk, Airedale, Lakeland, West Highland, Jack Russell, Wire-Haired Fox and Wheaten etc.,) continue to be docked and yet there are anomalies within each variety.

Sussex spaniel – docked tail

Irish water spaniel – full tail

5.5.5. Irish and American Water Spaniels, and Portuguese water dogs are all undocked, as are Cavalier King Charles. Many large breeds that originally were guard dogs for sheep flocks similar to the Old English such as the German Shepherd (Alsatian), Briard, Puli, Maremma, Bearded Collie, Kuvasz, Akbash, Bernese Sennenhund and Pyrenean, all retain their full tails. Finally, among terriers the Manchester, Bedlington, Bull, Staffordshire Bull, Dandie Dinmont and Skye also remain undocked.

Alsatian – full tail, low carriage

Bedlington terrier – undocked tail

5.5.6. Border terriers may be docked or remain undocked; they are described as being trained to kill foxes and go to ground. If they are undocked and yet do go to ground this directly refutes the commonly held view of working terrier owners that docking is essential to allow dogs to turn in confined spaces underground.

Border terrier – full tail, high carriage

Parson Jack Russell – undocked tail

5.5.7. Parson Jack Russell terriers were originally bred for the same purpose. of fox hunting. The breed or type standard described by the Parson Russell Terrier Club on 1st August 2000, states that the tail is customarily docked *yet can also be full and undocked*, and still be regarded as a true Parson Russell terrier. This latter remark similarly impugns comments from breeders, the dog-owning general public and some veterinary surgeons on what appear to be fixed and inflexible breed/type physical standards.

5.5.8. It is apposite to note that the fox, as their quarry, carries a full natural tail and yet manages to live and turn round satisfactorily below that same ground. There is

no scientific evidence or anecdotal comment to show that foxes suffer tail injuries related to their physical form or behaviour.

5.5.9. Afghan hounds, Bearded collies, Maltese terriers and Silky terriers all have long haired coats and tails, and do not require docking to obviate faecal fouling of the perineal region, but rather proper and careful grooming which can include clipping hair in that region by the owner. This is non-invasive, less painful and indicative of a better approach to animal welfare.

Afghan hound – full tail, long coat

Bearded collie – full tail, long coat

5.5.10. It should be noted that the British Kennel Club have developed standards for breeds which incorporate both docked and undocked specifications for the tail.

5.6 **The case for allowing docking in certain dogs.**

5.6.1 There is widespread support by the country sports interest groups for an exemption from a ban on tail docking for certain breeds of working dog. They argue that if a ban is all inclusive then the welfare of working spaniels and Hunt Point Retrieve breeds will be compromised by tail injuries.

5.6.2 The role of these working dogs in the shooting field frequently involves working in heavy cover to flush and retrieve gamebirds. It is the combination of the type of cover and the rapid side to side motion of the tail in these breeds that puts them at greater risk of tail injury when compared to, for example, labradors and foxhounds.

5.6.3 Currently the majority of these dogs are docked and there are relatively few reports of tail injury. Most of the reports that have been received are anecdotal in nature and all relate to Springer spaniels, possibly because they are the most commonly used breeds for this type of work. Correspondence received by Defra cites damaged tail tips and raw and bleeding tails, with tail movement spreading blood over the dog's back and flanks as shown in the photographs below. Such injuries can be slow to heal and frequently recur when the dog is returned to work. Interestingly several cases indicate that, following tail injury, some dogs are reluctant to perform their working duties.

5.6.4 There is, however, no scientific evidence to confirm that undocked working dogs are at greater risk than docked working dogs and it is recognised that any research would be long term in nature.

5.6.5 It has also been reported to Defra that the use of undocked Springer spaniels by the police in search operations in enclosed spaces housing hard objects, such as wooden boxes, has resulted in damage to tail tips leading to eventual partial amputation of the dogs' tails.

6. Aspects of pain in dogs

6.1. The sensation of pain is a response to a noxious stimulus and should elicit withdrawal reflex/escape and cardiovascular/inflammatory responses (Sneddon and Gentle, 2002).

6.2. Many people are unwilling to accept that animals can feel pain as they believe that animals are incapable of feeling emotions that are similar to those in humans (Sneddon and Gentle 2002). This bizarre attitude is illogical and clearly unsound. It is now widely accepted that animals do experience pain. The 1999 EU Treaty of Amsterdam recognises that animals are sentient beings, that is - they do have feelings. The management of pain in animals is an important role in the veterinary profession (Flecknell and Waterman-Pearson 2000).

6.3. Mammals, including dogs and humans, possess the same neural transmitters, receptors, pathways and higher brain centres (Wansborough 1996) and whilst animals may show different signs of pain (Fleeman 1995) it is clear they do feel pain in the same way as man, and the pain threshhold has been determined to be the same in both dog and man (Fleeman 1995).

6.4. Acute pain is abrupt in onset and relatively short in duration; it may be caused by traumatic injury or surgery etc. Such pain produces a stress response but usually does not lead to distress as the insult is short-lived; it is alleviated by analgesics and associated distress may be responsive to tranquilizers (National Research Council 1992). Acute pain lasts a few hours/days and should not outlast the actual healing process (Molony and Kent 1997).

6.5. Protagonists of docking insist that puppies do not feel pain when amputation of the tail takes place within a few days of birth and that the temporary discomfort, if any, is soon dispelled as many puppies become quiet afterwards and search for the dam's teats in order to suckle. It is uncommon for either analgesia or anaesthesia to be used and opponents of docking believe it is quite obvious that puppies do feel acute pain at docking. The initial pain from the direct injury to the nervous system caused by cutting or crushing the tail of a neonatal puppy would be intense and at a level that would not be permitted to be inflicted upon a human (Wansborough 1996). Abnormal vocalisation characterised by either whimpering or squealing with wriggling of the tail stump or the whole body, and sometimes urination, are common reactions. Merely because some puppies cease making noises soon afterwards cannot be construed as an indication that any pain has stopped as animals tend to be more stoic than humans due to an inherent preservation instinct (Wansborough 1996).

6.6. Subsequent inflammation in an unclosed wound following docking together with the production of algogenic (pain producing) substances and hyperexcitation of the dorsal horn pathway can lead ultimately to pathological chronic pain.

6.7. Chronic pain is slow in onset, its intensity is inconstant and is more likely to lead to distress and maladaptive behaviour; it is not generally totally alleviated by analgesics but associated distress may be alleviated by tranquilizers.

6.8. Post-amputation neuromas, better described as abnormal regeneration or hyperplasia of nerves, have been reported in dogs. Caudal pain associated with adhesions at the site of docking has also been described in dogs (Carr 1979, Gross and Carr 1990). Pathological pain is associated with the inflammatory response to tissue damage or the sensation perceived from damage directly to the nervous system and has no threshold (Wansborough 1996). It is characterised by a range of components:

- allodynia (a normal innocuous stimulus is painful);
- flare reaction (widening of the painful area);
- referred pain (pain from injured tissues spreads to intact tissues);
- spontaneous pain (pain occurs without a demonstrable stimulus);
- sympathetic dystrophy (pathological interaction between sensory and sympathetic nervous systems).

However, there is no clearly defined evidence that pathological pain occurs in dogs with docked tails.

6.9. There is no tangible evidence of so-called ghosting or phantom pain in dogs after docking or in animals generally. This may be because such conditions in man are associated with loss of a limb rather than an appendage, and usually contain auto-descriptions of the condition with a significant psychological component. For humans to assume that animals also experience phantom pain could be construed as another anthropomorphic presumption, although Wansborough (1996) does describe sensation perceived from damage to the nervous system as one cause of pathological pain and further, suggests that stoicism in dogs may mask phantom pain such that misdiagnosis or failure to diagnose may occur.

6.10. If the practice of docking tails as is currently conducted was proposed as an experimental procedure then it would be subjected to the requirements contained in Chapter 2 Section; 2.1 The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; which regulates any experimental or other scientific procedure applied to a "protected animal" [Section 1] that may have the effect of causing that animal pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm [Section 2]. A procedure so defined by the Act is referred to in this Guidance as a "regulated procedure". Thus the Act would not allow the procedure of tail docking in puppies without the use of an anaesthetic.

7. Veterinary professional opinion within and without the UK

7.1. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons has instructed veterinary surgeons not to dock dogs tails since 1996. Some veterinary surgeons do, nevertheless, continue to dock puppies tails ostensibly to offset welfare concerns by preventing it being done by lay people, whilst other veterinary surgeons continue to insist it is a justifiable prophylactic procedure. Continuing
correspondence in the Veterinary Record demonstrates the polarised opinions owned by the veterinary profession in the UK (Holmes 2002, Blakeway 2002).

7.2. The British Small Animal Veterinary Association (1995) and World Small Animal Veterinary Association (August 2001) followed suit in agreeing to a ban on prophylactic docking.

7.3. Enquiries have been made to the clinical departments of UK veterinary schools to see if they have data on dog tail injuries; Professor Sullivan of the University of Glasgow has stated that he has seen probably two or three injured tails in some 60-70,000 dogs over a 20 year period; [Comments awaited from other vet schools].

7.4. In an extensive veterinary scientific evaluation of tail docking in dogs Wansborough (1996) tested the six criteria proposed by Morton (1992):
"*to test the necessity to remove or modify any part of a dog":*

- Is there evidence that leaving the dog intact predisposes it to harmful consequences ?;
- Is there evidence that the interference is in the best interests of the dog and will be beneficial to the dog?;
- Would the harmful consequences or the benefit occur in a significant proportion of dogs and therefore justify the procedure on all dogs of a particular breed?;
- Does the proposed interference cause greater harm to the dog than the damage one is trying to prevent?;
- Is there another way with no, or lesser, adverse effects that would achieve the same end ?, and
- Does the increase in "value" as a result of the interference justify the harm done to the dog?.

7.5. He concluded that submitting dogs to a procedure known to be painful and which may have harmful consequences, just to satisfy a centuries old custom, cannot be justified in a humane society. Cosmetic tail docking cannot be justified

from a veterinary medical or scientific viewpoint and recent advances in our knowledge about pain indicate that docking should be regarded as an inhumane act.

Boxers – docked and undocked

Poodle – docked/clipped for exhibition

8. Conclusion

The arguments put forward by those who wish docking to be continued for cosmetic purposes are unsound from a scientific viewpoint, are contrary to accepted standards for the welfare of the dog(s) and serve only to contribute to artificial physical breed standards. However, the welfare costs of not docking should be balanced by the risk of tail injury and resulting poor welfare. If there is clear evidence that the dog will be at some risk of tail injury. As many dogs of a specific breed may never be trained to the gun it is difficult to justify exempting all dogs of a specific working breed from the procedure. Where, however, a ban on tail docking is not likely to be in the best interests of a particular dog because it is destined to work in the field, it may be prudent to exempt such dogs for the time being, with any exemption being subject to review in the light of further knowledge based on scientific evidence.

This review of the literature allows the following statements to be made with reference to tail docking in dogs:

- The removal of a tail, whole or in part, from a breed or type of dog that is born with a full tail, deprives the dog of a major body appendage and may result in behavioural changes in individual dogs;
- Tail docking definitely causes pain in neonatal puppies; neither anaesthetics nor post-surgical analgesics are routinely used;
- Chronic pain after tail docking in dogs is not supported by firm data derived from scientific studies;
- There is no scientific evidence that puppies/dogs show phantom limb pain following tail docking;

- Post docking complications of infection and disorganised nerve re-growth with increased sensitivity may occur;
- Tail docking is considered by some to prevent future tail injury, faecal soiling and myiasis.
- Tail docking could be allowed to continue, but performed only by a veterinary surgeon in cases of tail injury, malformation or disease, for the welfare of an individual dog where the normal remedial treatment is unsuccessful, or if it deemed necessary to prevent future injury.

9. Legislation against dog tail docking in Europe and other countries

9.1. The European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals (ETS no. 125) was open for signature on 13 November 1987 and came into force on 1 May 1992 – (ECPPA).

Article 3 – Basic principles for animal welfare

- (1) Nobody shall cause a pet animal unnecessary pain suffering or distress.

Article 10 – Surgical operations

- (1) Surgical procedures for the purpose of modifying the appearance of a pet animal or for other non-curative purposes shall be prohibited and, in particular (a) the docking of tails etc;

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

- (3) Operations in which the animal will or is likely to experience severe pain shall be carried out under anaesthesia only by a veterinarian or under his supervision.

Article 21 – Reservations

- (1) Any State, may at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance or accession, declare that it avails itself of one or more reservations in respect of Article 6 and Article 10, paragraph 1, sub-paragraph a. No other reservation may be made.

9.2. Switzerland banned docking in 1988 – currently only docked dogs over 5 months old can be imported.

9.3. Finland signed the ECPPA in 1991, ratified in 1991 and brought it into force on 1st July 1992 but with a reservation on tail docking in dogs; Finland has banned all docked dogs from competing in shows but authorities are concerned that some exhibitors are exporting their animals to countries where docking is allowed, then re-importing them.

9.4. Israel banned docking/cropping in dogs (amendment to ban cosmetic surgery in animal tissue in Cruelty to Animals (Animal Protection) Law in December 2000;

9.5. Germany signed the ECPPA in 1988, ratified in 1991 and the date of entry into force was 1st May 1992; a reservation on dog tail docking in hunting breeds was given, but exempted puppies must be the offspring of parents that were specifically used as hunting dogs, not just hunting breeds;

9.6. Sweden signed the ECPPA in 1989, ratified also in 1989 and brought it into force in 1992. After a prohibition on docking on 1 January 1989 there was an apparent increase in tail injuries reported among 'working dogs '. A survey of 53 litters of German shorthaired pointers used mainly for hunting (shooting) was conducted during 1990 –1991. Injuries increased to 51% of the group = 92 individuals = 1 in 3 dogs with serious tail injury (Council for Docked Breeds).

German pointer – docked tail.

English pointer – undocked tail

9.7. English pointers are not docked. Nevertheless, it would be unsound to attempt to extrapolate the Swedish data derived from German shorthaired pointers and infer that similar injuries would be encountered in using English pointers, or indeed, any other breed of pointer or working dogs, in the field in the UK.

9.8. Norway banned tail docking in dogs in 1987.

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