

Tail docking

The SA Veterinary Council (SAVC) has banned the docking of puppies' tails by vets, yet it is legal for farmers to dock the tails of lambs and to dehorn calves! What are the real facts?

FALLACY-

SA Wingshooters opposes the ban on tail docking in dogs.

FACT-

SA Wingshooters supports a ban on tail docking in dogs for purely cosmetic reasons, but are insisting on the docking of tails of bird dog breeds for functional reasons, namely to prevent tail injuries while working in the field.



FALLACY-

It is illegal for lay persons to dock the tails of puppies.

FACT-

There is no law or regulation that prohibits a lay person or breeder or owner from docking the tail of a puppy or a lamb or de-horn a calf. But if the procedure causes unnecessary pain and suffering, then the person doing the docking could be charged with animal cruelty. For this reason, the tails of bird dog puppies must be docked up to the age of five days, using an acceptable and standard procedure, preferably performed by a veterinarian.



FALLACY-

Tail docking is a cruel procedure and causes unnecessary pain.

FACT-

According to research, the effect is minor provided it is done before 5 days of age. The tails of puppies of bird dogs are docked to prevent much more

Survey of working pointer breeds in South Africa to determine the extend of tail injuries amongst docked and undocked tails, 2003 - 2006.

BREED	NO. DOGS	UNDOCKED TAILS	DOCKED TAILS	NO. TAIL INJURIES	% TAIL INJURIES
GSP	251	0	251	0	0
GSP	1	1	0	1*	100
Cross GSP x Eng. Pointer	1	1	0	1	100
Eng. Pointer	80	80	0	51**	63.75

* Injury severe and requires constant treatment. Tail taped before working in the field to prevent further injuries.

** Forty two (42) of the tail injuries were regarded as slight (showed bleeding) and required little treatment to heal. Seven (7) of the tail injuries were regarded as severe and required prolonged treatment to heal. Two (2) of the tail injuries were severe enough to result in amputation.

serious and painful tail injuries in adult bird dogs in the field. It is, therefore, a functional procedure to **prevent** serious pain and suffering in the adult dog. SA Wingshooters has collated extensive scientific data to support this position and there is no legal precedent or court ruling to the contrary. The docking of tails in working dogs or bird dogs has been allowed in England and Wales by the House of Lords (see press article below).

FALLACY-

The SA Veterinary Council (SAVC) has consulted extensively with stakeholders prior to introducing the ban on tail docking by veterinarians.

FACT-

“Although the Veterinary Council claims that they have widely consulted in this regard, neither the Kennel Union of Southern Africa (KUSA) nor any of its affiliated Clubs who care for and foster the affected breeds have been contacted with regard to this issue,” according to a statement by KUSA.

At the first meeting of SA Wingshooters with the SAVC, we were informed that “the decision to ban tail docking was final.” After presenting the SAVC with substantial scientific proof to support tail docking in bird dogs, the Council said that it was an Animals Protection Act matter which falls outside of the jurisdiction of the Council. Yet, their ban on vets was reconfirmed.

Statement by SA Wingshooters:

If a member is charged with animal cruelty due to tail docking, we will provide all available documentation and scientific evidence to assist in such member's legal defence. Provided the docking was performed correctly before the age of 5 days



Lords uphold the tail docking exemption

The tail docking exemption for working dogs looks likely to remain unchanged in the Animal Welfare Bill following a debate in the Lords. Despite concerns from Lord Soulsby, the majority of peers were satisfied with the exemption tabled in the House of Commons.

The issue may be debated

again at report stage of the Bill but it seems certain that the working dog exemption will remain intact.

The government tabled some technical amendments to the Bill which were agreed during debate. These reinforce the provision that only terriers, pointers, spaniels and their cross

breeds can be docked for prophylactic reasons.

SAVC's director of communications, Christopher Gallus, said: "The exemption for working dogs is an important victory for animal welfare and I am pleased that the peers debating this issue came to the same conclusion."

NOW WHAT?

Breeders who advertise bird dog puppies of breeds in which tail docking is standard practice, must clearly state if the tails were docked or not. At 6 or 9 weeks of age, it is too late to dock tails and an invasive surgical tail amputation under general anaesthetic must be done by a veterinarian – an expensive and painful procedure that can cost as much as the puppy itself!

Breeders who want to dock the tails of puppies at 5 days, should follow the accepted procedure or have it done by an official of their bird dog club.