



## **VETERINARY IRELAND PRESS RELEASE**

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### **VETS CALL FOR COMPLETE BAN ON TAIL DOCKING OF PUPPIES**

Veterinary Ireland, the representative body for veterinary surgeons in Ireland, has called for specific Irish legislation banning the act of Tail Docking in puppies.

Speaking as Chairperson for Veterinary Ireland's Companion Animal Society (VICAS), Alan Rossiter MVB stated that "*VICAS unequivocally supports a specific legislative ban on docking of puppies, and a ban on the showing of dogs docked after such legislation is in place, which would bring Ireland into line with the UK and many of our EU partners*".

According to Mr Rossiter, "*we in Ireland are in a minority in Europe in not having a complete and specific legislative ban on tail docking of puppies for cosmetic or prophylactic reasons, and in particular we are out of step with the UK who introduced a ban in 2007*" he said.

Tail docking is the term used to describe the act of mutilation of shortening an animal's tail by amputation, undertaken when the dog is just a puppy and without anaesthesia or pain relief. Most dogs are docked for cosmetic reasons, in that breeders believe it is "normal" for their breed, or that a docked dog is more likely to win at shows.

Tail docking is considered by the vets' statutory body, The Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) to be an '*act of veterinary medicine*' as defined by Section 53 of the Veterinary Practice Act 2005. An act of veterinary medicine can only be legally performed by a Registered Veterinary Practitioner and under the VCI's ethical code, veterinary practitioners are prohibited from performing '*purely cosmetic*' procedures. Performing a tail docking for cosmetic reasons could therefore leave a vet open to disciplinary action by the VCI.

Certain breeds of working dogs are tail docked as a precautionary measure based on the premise that the tail may suffer damage in later life when the dog is working. On this "prophylactic" reasoning, Mr Rossiter states that "*there is no scientific evidence to show that undocked working dogs damage their tails any more than undocked non-working dogs. A seven year study at the University of Edinburgh Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies showed insufficient evidence of statistical significance to suggest a positive association between tail*

*injuries and undocked tails (Darke et al, 1985). In other words the risk of tail injury is equal in working dogs compared to non-working dogs and thus there is no argument to say that an exception should be made for working dogs only – all dogs whether working or not are at equal risk to tail injury. This refutes any argument which may be put forward to make allowances for the ‘prophylactic’ docking of certain working breeds so as to reduce the incidence or severity of future tail injuries. Furthermore most of the dogs from a litter of the ‘working breeds’ that have traditionally been docked would end up as pet dogs in a family home setting”.*

VICAS is working on a public education campaign to inform pet owners of what tail docking is, why it is not necessary and why they should request an un-docked dog when purchasing a puppy. *“Tail docking is a painful, unnecessary act, which poses a significant health risk to the puppy”* he said. *“Docking serves no purpose for the dog when done for only cosmetic or prophylactic reasons. Also, many people who buy a pup do not know how it has been docked and express surprise and shock when the circumstances under which the procedure is carried out is explained to them. It is clear on questioning that the vast majority of such owners would have preferred if their puppy’s tail had been left as it was when born”* he continued.

From recent information received from Dogs Trust, one of the biggest dog welfare organizations in Ireland and the UK, there are reports that breeders from the UK are traveling to Ireland to have their puppies’ tails docked and then returning them to the UK for sale, or even bringing over pregnant bitches to whelp, docking the pups and then returning. Adverts seen in the UK media have even stated that this loophole exists and has been utilized. *“While this is illegal under various UK legislation, and there has been at least one prosecution in Scotland, it is not illegal under Irish law for a person to bring their puppies into Ireland, with the purpose to have them docked. Unfortunately, such procedures are then being performed by non-vets”* said Mr Rossiter. *“When docking is done by a non-vet it is done with no anesthesia or pain control, without the correct equipment for such a surgical procedure and not in the sterile and controlled conditions one would expect in a veterinary surgery, which leaves the puppy open to pain, infection and risk of death”.*

The Veterinary Ireland policy is that, unless for purely therapeutic reasons, then tail docking and other acts of mutilation (such as ear cropping and dew-clawing) for cosmetic and prophylactic reasons should be banned. Veterinary Ireland, its Animal Welfare Committee and VICAS have made submissions to government on this issue and are hopeful that such a ban will be very specifically defined in the forthcoming Animal Health and Welfare Bill, expected sometime this year. *“To VICAS, it is an embarrassment that Irish legislation is not yet in line with other jurisdictions, in particular with the legislation in the UK, and that we are not protecting the welfare of animals to the same extent as our neighbours are,”* said Mr Rossiter in conclusion.

The Veterinary Ireland position paper on **“Tail Docking in Dogs and other Acts of Mutilation in Animals”** is available at:

<http://www.veterinaryireland.ie/Links/PDFs/Policies/Tail%20Docking%20in%20Dogs%20and%20Other%20Acts%20of%20Mutilation%20in%20Animals%20-%202028.2.08.pdf>

**For more information**  
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