

Tail injuries in working dogs in Scotland

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The pre-emptive docking of dogs tails to reduce the risk of injury remains a controversial issue in the UK. In 2007, England, Wales and Scotland introduced a ban on non-therapeutic docking of dogs' tails. England and Wales introduced exceptions for certain working breeds and working breed types, such as dogs destined to be used for shooting, whereas Scotland opted for a complete ban on all non-therapeutic docking. The Scottish Government made a commitment to examine the evidence on the effect of this all inclusive ban some years after the original decision. As part of that review we have conducted research with the following broad aims: (1) estimate the prevalence of tail injury in working dogs and working dog breeds which have been docked to different lengths; (2) identify risk factors for tail injury in working dogs in Scotland. We conducted three studies to address these aims: an online survey; examined clinical veterinary records; and a prospective case-control study. This abstract briefly describes the results of the online survey. The incidence of owner reported tail injury varied significantly with respect to breed and tail length. Spaniels and Hunt Point Retrievers were significantly more likely to incur a tail injury, while working, than other working breeds ($P < 0.001$). Compared to undocked tails or tails that had just had the tip removed, docking by one-third, half or short was associated with a significant reduction in the likelihood of tail injury ($P \leq 0.001$). There was no significant difference in the likelihood of tail injury between dogs that had tails docked by one-third, half or short. These results indicate that docking by one-third may be sufficient to provide the maximal reduction in the likelihood of tail injury in working dogs and that docking to a shorter length may be of no significant extra benefit in terms of preventing future injury. The authors gratefully acknowledge the Scottish Government for providing the funding for this project.