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FAQ's - Frequently Asked Questions

Is docking painful, surely it is an unjustified mutilation?

The CDB claim that docking cannot be described as a mutilation. This emotive term is completely without foundation and is used by singularly ill-informed sources.

Pain is not an issue, as agreed by Mr J. Walsby MRCVS, Past President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

When docking is carried out proficiently on whelps aged 2-7 days, there is a minimal amount of momentary discomfort and the puppies can immediately resume sucking on the dam with no sign of distress to either dam or whelp.

[Prof. Dr. R. Fritsch](#) explains why tail docking in very young pups is not painful.

Is there a prophylactic advantage ?

The main prophylactic advantages are the minimising of tail damage and/or preventing infection in later life. Docking is carried out to protect the future welfare of the whelp.

Doesn't a dogs tail assist balance and communication?

Balance and communication is not affected by docking as explained in a letter from [Prof. Q. Latham Ph D.](#)

Where adult tail amputation is necessary, can't pain be minimised by anaesthetics?

To stop the docking of whelps on this understanding, is a somewhat cynical view which does not address the phantom limb problem that can occur. Additionally there is a considerable risk in anaesthesia. The repair of chronic tail injuries are often protracted, difficult and traumatic for both dog and owner.

Does the RCVS recognise any difference between working and show dogs?

The RCVS does not differentiate between working dogs, show dogs or companion pets. They describe the procedure of tail docking as an "unnecessary mutilation" regardless of the breed, or whether the dog is involved in work or being exhibited. The phraseology is often embellished with the vivid description of it being a "painful mutilation" for added effect and in an attempt to justify their claim that a ban is in the interest of all breeds, for welfare reasons.

Doesn't the RCVS already allow vets to dock litters which will be worked?



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Not so. The guidelines given to vets includes the following restrictions;

c. Prophylactic docking to prevent injury at some unspecified time in the future is not acceptable unless the veterinary surgeon has full knowledge of the breed, the strain, and the anticipated lifestyle of the dog. At ten days of age rarely could the lifestyle of the dog be predicted with any certainty. It follows that the routine docking of many breeds under ten days of age can rarely be acceptable for prophylactic reasons.

d. It should be understood that repeated unethical behaviour may raise unethical action to the level of being considered disgraceful. Any veterinary surgeon performing the operation routinely might therefore be required to satisfy the RCVS that he did so for prophylactic reasons which met the above criteria.

Wouldn't it be better if the pups in a litter which are to be worked were exempt?

This is a dangerous over-simplification. Let us consider a breed which is both worked and shown, such as the English Springer Spaniel. Within a litter, pups could end up in working homes, show homes or companion homes. Regardless of who has bred them, individual dogs from every litter will display the same traits when out roaming loose. An ESS for example will delight in rummaging through the undergrowth when exercising, thrashing its tail against whatever happens to get in its path. An undocked companion dog is as likely to damage its tail as much as a working dog in such conditions. Is it fair to suggest protecting just working dogs by docking and to put companion dogs through the pain and trauma of the protracted healing process which ensues?

There are already documented cases of tail damage to undocked non-working English Springer Spaniels, and the Swedes have experienced tail damage in the home as well as in the field.

If breeds capable of being worked can justify being docked, aren't the remainder docked for cosmetic reasons?

Genuine reasons exist for the docking of many other breeds and the description "cosmetic" is often used by those opposed to docking, in an attempt to heighten the difference between working breeds where the need to dock is obvious, and the rest where reasons are less evident to the general public. The main reason for docking are as follows:

1. To avoid tail damage

A number of working gundog breeds have to hunt game through heavy vegetation and thick brambles, where their fast tail action can easily lead to torn and bleeding tails



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which are painful and extremely difficult to treat. Docking the end of the tail eliminates the risk of injury.

Working terriers are docked for the same reason. In addition, terriers which are bred to hunt below ground for purposes such as fox control, have their tails docked to a length which is more practical when working in a confined space.

Many other non-working breeds also have an enthusiastic tail action with little protection, like the Boxer and Dobermann. Such breeds are also liable to damage their tails, even in the home.

2. For reasons of hygiene

Long haired, thick coated breeds like the Yorkshire Terrier and Old English Sheepdog are docked to avoid the hair around the base of the tail becoming fouled by faeces. Even with constant grooming and washing, such fouling is unpleasant. If allowed to get out of hand, it can lead to severe problems of hygiene, or even flystrike and subsequent infestation by maggots.

Hygiene problems can be greatly reduced or eliminated altogether by docking.

When I breed my bitch, all the pups will be going to working homes, so will I easily find a vet to dock them for me?

Unfortunately not. Whilst the number of vets prepared to carry out the procedure is still increasing, the vast majority do so only in strict confidence, whilst they remain under the threat of being disciplined by the RCVS. The majority of calls received now by the CDB Helpline, come from breeders of working dogs who wish to become members, as they cannot find a vet prepared to assist.