



College of Veterinarians of British Columbia

PRESS RELEASE

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Veterinarians of British Columbia ban tail docking and alteration of dogs, horses and cattle

NORTH VANCOUVER, British Columbia, November 8, 2016 -- After an unprecedented voter response from the registrants of the College of Veterinarians of British Columbia (CVBC), 91.5 percent of those who voted cast their ballots in favour of banning the cosmetic tail docking of dogs, horses and cattle, and tail alteration in horses. The decision brings British Columbia in line with a majority of provinces across Canada and supports the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association's (CVMA) position on the practices.

"Veterinarians in B.C. have advanced animal welfare in the province through this vote," says College President Dr. Brendan Matthews. "B.C. now joins the four Atlantic provinces, and Quebec, on banning these cosmetic procedures."

No scientific evidence supports a welfare or medical benefit for tail docking or alteration, but evidence does show a detrimental effect on behaviour and animal communication, as well as the risk for infection and phantom pain.

Some breed associations continue to resist bans because of historical practices. However, Matthews points out, "veterinarians have an ethical responsibility to the animals they treat and tail docking goes against that responsibility. We ask other provinces to follow suit and for breed associations to recognize the changing times." In addition to cosmetic tail docking and tail alteration, ear cropping is banned in B.C.

The ban makes the practice of tail docking and alteration, along with ear cropping, an unethical practice of veterinary medicine, and veterinarians found continuing the practice will face disciplinary action from the CVBC. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act authorizes the BC SPCA to investigate and recommend charges against any person, veterinarian or otherwise, believed to be carrying out such procedures.

For more information contact the CVBC at 604-929-7090. Learn more about the CVBC at <http://www.cvbc.ca>

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Background Information

Tail docking is a necessary procedure only when carried out in cases of injury or for medical reasons (i.e. surgery to remove cancerous tissue). Some owners and some veterinarians assert that tail docking provides a benefit to the animal. However, there is no scientific evidence to support this claim except to some degree for pigs and sheep given the current North American production systems that are widely in use. There is strong evidence to support a detrimental effect on behaviour and communication, and risks of phantom pain and other serious complications with tail docking.

Tail alterations in horses include tail nicking and tail blocking. Tail nicking involves cutting the tail muscle for the purpose of achieving a high tail carriage for the show ring. Horses then require the need of a tail brace and the use of their tails is greatly compromised throughout the remainder of their lives. Tail blocking involves injecting the major nerves of the tail with a substance that affects the horse's ability to move the tail. Tail docking involves the removal of part of the tailbone. In horses, tail docking and alteration limits the ability of tail swishing and thus impairs fly control and communication with other horses. All of these procedures can be associated with serious health risks and complications.

Long-standing customs are not necessarily in the best interests of the animal. Veterinarians have an ethical responsibility and must act within the best interests of the animals that they treat. Tail docking or any procedure done solely for historical reasons without supporting evidence to continue the practice goes against the CVMA's veterinary oath, which states that veterinarians have a responsibility to promote animal health and welfare.

Many countries of Europe, Australia and New Zealand prohibit or restrict tail docking. For years, veterinary regulators from Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia have had bylaws prohibiting their members from performing cosmetic surgeries including tail docking and tail alterations, and ear cropping. Newfoundland and Labrador has had, for many years, a legal prohibition against these practices. PEI's legal prohibition came into effect in 2016. Quebec in 2017 will ban cosmetic surgeries including tail docking, and ear cropping. Ear cropping is also banned in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

In Canada, the CVMA has communicated its concerns about cosmetic surgeries to the dog breeding community. The CVMA has consistently encouraged breed associations and kennel clubs to change breed standards and their stance on cosmetic alterations. One concern that breeders have is that unaltered dogs will not be able to compete against altered dogs in shows. Some breed associations have already made these changes, and we call upon all others to bring about changes to their standards as has been done in other countries.

Some individuals have expressed concerns that prohibiting veterinarians from performing cosmetic surgeries will lead to breeders or owners performing the surgery themselves. This, however, has not been seen to be the case in other jurisdictions that have passed similar bans in Canada. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act of BC gives the BC SPCA the authority to investigate and recommend charges against any person who causes distress to an animal, as defined in the PCA Act. There is an exception for veterinarians who may cause distress to an animal by virtue of performing a medically necessary procedure in accordance with the standards of the profession. If tail docking and alteration is no longer considered an acceptable procedure in accordance with the standards of the profession, then any individual performing a cosmetic procedure could face charges under the PCA Act, including a veterinarian. Veterinarians are obligated to report any incidents of animal abuse and cruelty.

With the inclusion of the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle into the PCA Act in July of 2015, which states that "dairy cattle must not be tail docked unless medically necessary," it is illegal under the Act to dock the tail of dairy cattle in British Columbia. The Canadian national Codes of Practice state that tail docking and alteration is prohibited in beef cattle and in horses, and is acceptable only with strict guidelines for pigs and sheep. The Codes for all farm animals, such as beef cattle, sheep and pigs, as well as horses, contain the most up-to-date scientifically based information on husbandry standards, and should thus be followed. The PCA Act refers to "reasonable and generally accepted practices" when referring to prohibiting persons from causing or allowing an animal to be in distress.

References:

CVMA Position Statements

www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/cosmetic-alteration
<http://www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/tail-alteration-of-horses>
www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/tail-docking-of-dairy-cattle
www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/tail-docking-of-sheep

National Farm Animal Care Council Codes of Practice

www.nfacc.ca/pdfs/codes/equine_code_of_practice.pdf (page 46)
www.nfacc.ca/pdfs/codes/dairy_code_of_practice.pdf (page 34)
www.nfacc.ca/pdfs/codes/beef_code_of_practice.pdf (page 25)
www.nfacc.ca/pdfs/codes/sheep_code_of_practice.pdf (page 40-41)
www.nfacc.ca/pdfs/codes/pig_code_of_practice.pdf (page 34)

Prince Edward Island's Animal Welfare Act

www.assembly.pe.ca/bills/pdf_first/65/1/bill-2.pdf (page 5 - 6. (2) a, b)

BC SPCA Summary of NFACC Code Guidelines

www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/wcvspring2016 (page 32)

Other Resources

American Veterinary Medical Association:

www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Ear-Cropping-and-Tail-Docking-of-Dogs.aspx
www.avma.org/KB/Resources/LiteratureReviews/Documents/tail_docking_cattle_bgnd.pdf
www.avma.org/KB/Resources/LiteratureReviews/Documents/Horse%20Tail%20Modification.pdf

American Animal Hospital Association:

www.aahanet.org/Library/CropDock.aspx

World Small Animal Veterinary Association:

www.wsava.org/sites/default/files/WSAVA%20CodeOfConductManual_October2010.pdf