



Tail docking

South African veterinarians are governed by the VETERINARY AND PARA-VETERINARY PROFESSIONS ACT NO. 19 OF 1982; following our mission statement, to 'protect the health and well-being of animals and animal populations', we endeavour to abide by strict rules of practice, ethics and honesty, taking into consideration the client, the profession and most importantly the welfare of the patient.

Observing a global trend where veterinarians are constantly assessing procedures carried out on all animals, it was felt appropriate to cease docking puppies tails as it is considered unnecessary, has no functional value, in

no way improves the quality of life of the animal and most importantly is regarded painful and unethical.

Veterinary Science is an ever-evolving science and it is incumbent on us as a profession to stay at the 'cutting edge' of developments in all spheres including ethics, as the general population becomes more sensitive to animal welfare and we as a profession become more proficient in understanding the way the animal body works, it is imperative that we are open to change and adapt to the needs of our patients, particularly in minimising the pain inflicted upon them.



Some tail vocabulary

- Slight wags with small swings: commonly a simple greeting - "Hi there"
- Low sweeping wag: satisfaction, positive interest, "let us play"
- Broad wags: happy and relaxed "glad to see you"
- Fast broad wag or big, fast circular motion: happy slow wags with the tail at half-mast: less social, could mean insecurity
- Rapid wag with tail between the hind legs: nervousness or fear
- Tail tucked up tight against the abdomen: submission and fear; probably motivated by the need to cover the genitals to avoid another dog's attempts to sniff or mount him
- Tail raised and bristled: very confident and ready to react aggressively
- A high-held stiff tail signals imminent attack – with or without any other body language visible
- Tail held high and stiffly wagging at the tip only – ready to react aggressively

So tail talk may indicate advise of joy, fear, anxiety (thunderstorm approaching), or of caution; it enables allows one to avoid dog bites and informs when a shy or fearful dog has relaxed and is ready to make friends; while cutting off a dog's tail can be equated in humans to, if not to losing one's voice, then losing the ability to describe with your hands: it cuts off part of how they communicate.

As far as the Veterinary profession is concerned, tail docking is out-dated, unethical and unnecessary as it has no advantage for the animal or their welfare.

Please access these links (and also provide it to your clients):

- Tail docking brochure (http://www.savc.org.za/pdf_docs/tail_d_brochure.pdf)
- SAVC policy (<http://www.savc.org.za/tail-docking>)

The tail of a dog acts as a rudder in braking and turning and it is a well-known fact that all racing breeds and hunting hounds have tails and use them effectively. What has not been researched thoroughly yet is the effect of the loss of such a stabilising rudder to the back and hind limb joints of the dog.

The tail also makes up an important part of communication from dog to dog and from dog to man, and even when a dog's tail is wagging, looking at the tail itself renders a lot of information about what the dog is trying to say. ■