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Tail docking benefits working dogs, says study

Docking the tails of working dogs by a third while they are puppies could significantly decrease their risk of injury, according to research.

A survey of more than 1,000 owners of working dogs found more than half of undocked spaniels experienced a tail injury of some sort in the last year.

The study from the University of Glasgow was commissioned by the Scottish government.

Tail docking is banned but ministers are considering a change in the law.

It was outlawed in 2007, with penalties of a fine of up to £5,000 and/or six months imprisonment.

Exemptions are only made where a tail is injured or diseased.

The Scottish government is now seeking the views of different organisations on the issue following new research.

[It includes a study from the University of Glasgow](#) which concluded that docking at a young age would reduce the risk of injury.

[A second study from the same group](#) looked at records of working breed tail injuries from veterinary practices across Scotland.

It suggested that to prevent one tail injury, between 81 and 135 pointer, spaniel and hunt point retriever puppies would need to be docked.

Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead said: "It is clear to me that animal welfare is an extremely important issue and one which is close to many people's hearts.

"For that reason, any decision taken by the Scottish government fully considers the welfare of each and every animal affected.

"In some cases, as in this one, there is no clear, straightforward answer and a balance needs to be struck.

"This research that we have funded has provided a sound basis for us to discuss with concerned parties where that balance point should be between protecting the welfare of puppies and protecting the welfare of adult working dogs, and whether further action is justified to protect working dogs from injury."

He added: "I must stress that I have as yet taken no firm stance on this; we need to gain a clearer understanding of the views of interested parties in Scotland before any decision is made.

"I have therefore invited key interested parties to consider the findings of this research and to comment on whether they merit further consideration of a possible exemption to the ban on tail docking for specific working dogs."

A deadline of 23 May has been set for organisations to provide feedback.

Petition presented

Gamekeepers campaigned outside the Scottish Parliament earlier this year to end the ban.

The Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) presented a 4,158-signature petition to Mr Lochhead, calling for the ban to be reversed for working dogs on the grounds of animal welfare.

The group said many dogs suffered agonising tail injuries while working in thick undergrowth.

Animal rights charity OneKind has said that docking the tails of puppies causes "pain and distress".

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