

Rural and Environment Directorate

Animal Health and Welfare Division

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Franck David
Assistant Clerk
The Public Petitions Committee
TG.01
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

5th May 2010

Dear Franck

CONSIDERATION OF PETITIONS PE1196 and PE1230

Thank you for your letter of 22nd April following the meeting of the Public Petitions Committee on 20th April at which further consideration was given to petitions PE 1196 and PE 1230 on the tail docking of working dogs.

You have raised two specific points with the Scottish Government:

1. That the Scottish Government submit a response to the Public Petitions Committee once we have considered the outcomes of the study by the University of Bristol [and the Royal Veterinary College] on the risks of tail injuries in dogs.
2. What consideration have the Scottish Government given to the report on "Working Dog Injury Survey Analysis" produced by Biomathematics & Statistics Scotland and what is our answer to it?

On the first point: I can confirm that I shall submit a response to the Committee when we have considered the tail injury report.

Secondly, I have studied the analysis prepared by Iain McKendrick of Biomathematics & Statistics Scotland and I have also obtained a copy of the survey questionnaire, the covering letter and details of the methodology used in the dog tail survey conducted by Airlie Bruce Jones during 2008 and 2009.

This survey involved the completion of a questionnaire by owners of working Cocker Spaniels, Springer Spaniels and European hunt point retrievers between August 2008 and July 2009. Working dog owners were informed about the study via a number of rural organisations, via shoot managers and by word of mouth. Responses were received from over 160 dog workers and information was gathered on over 450 dogs.

The survey was designed to identify whether there was a relationship between tail injuries in working dogs of these breeds and of tail length (particularly whether the tail had been docked or not).

The analysis conducted by Biomathematics & Statistics Scotland examined the design of the study and whether the sample was likely to be biased. The analysis indicated that there may be some recruitment bias in the study, nevertheless, the author felt that as data had been collected from owners with more than one dog, an analysis of the data would provide relatively unbiased estimates of the risk factors. This analysis has concluded that the study has identified strong statistically significant evidence that working dogs belonging to the Springer and Cocker breeds have a higher risk of injury associated with longer tails. A similar effect was observed for hunt point retrievers, but that effect was not formally statistically significant.

However, this study was of working dogs, does not address the extent of tail injuries in the total dog population, the causes of these injuries, where tail injuries occur, and whether dogs of the same breed are more likely to injure their tails due to them being used as working dogs. There is also no indication to show how many dogs need to be docked to prevent one tail injury. It is these questions which the tail injury study undertaken by the Royal Veterinary College and the University of Bristol will consider.

This study is certainly useful but the Scottish Government is not able to change its policy and allow the tail docking of working dogs on such a study alone. Only when the Royal Veterinary College/University of Bristol report is published will we have all of the necessary information available.

I hope this is helpful.

Ian W Strachan
Animal Health and Welfare Division