

Rural and Environment Directorate
Animal Health and Welfare Division



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Franck David
Assistant Clerk
The Public Petitions Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

26th November 2010

Dear Franck

CONSIDERATION OF PETITIONS PE1196 & PE1230

Your letter of 28th October 2010 asked the Scottish Government;

“In light of the study by the University of Bristol and the Royal Veterinary College on the risks of tail injuries in dogs, will you commission, and when, further research focussing on the risk of tail injuries specifically in working dogs in Scotland, and how will such research conclusively address the questions raised in the petitions?”

As the Committee is aware the research undertaken by the University of Bristol and the Royal Veterinary College concluded that the incidence of tail injuries is low; breed was an important risk factor and docked dogs are less likely to injure their tails than undocked dogs. However, the report also concluded that tail injuries are not associated with work and most injuries were sustained in the home. This study covered all dogs, not just working dogs or working dog breeds.

As the tail docking ban is relatively recent there were relatively few working dogs with undocked tails in the study and thus it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions. New research will allow a larger sample of undocked dogs to be investigated. In fact the researchers suggested that further research be undertaken.

The research undertaken by Mr Airlie Bruce Jones did find a significant relationship between tail injuries and undocked Cocker and Springer Spaniels, however, terriers were not included in the study and the number of hunt point retrievers was too small to provide statistically significant evidence.

The Scottish Government has decided to commission further research which will be specifically targeted at working dog breeds in Scotland and these breeds will include spaniels, terriers and hunt point retrievers. We are presently writing the research

specification and will then seek tenders from interested organisations to conduct the research.

We anticipate that the research will examine the risk of tail injuries in working dog breeds, whether or not used as working dogs. The investigation of “work” will go further than the Airlie Bruce Jones research and look at dogs used in shooting, pest control, emergency rescue and in the armed forces. Dogs intended for use in all of these activities may be docked in England and Wales. All working dog breeds will be included, which will include terriers and hunt point retrievers as well as spaniels.

The research will examine the relationship between tail length and tail injury to provide information on whether any relaxation of the ban on tail docking should be restricted to removing only part of the tail, rather than allowing the full tail to be removed. Ministers will then be in a much better, more informed position to review the current policy.

It will take some time to agree the research specification, issue the tender document, allow time for tenders to be returned and for an assessment of the tenders to be made. Nevertheless, we hope that results will be available sometime next year.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Strachan
Head of Animal Welfare and Endemic Disease Branch