

PE2130/B: Make it illegal to remove all the hair from a horse's tail

Petitioner written submission, 18 January 2025

I note that the Government does not support or recommend the practice. Guidelines are not enforceable therefore legislation will be required. Legislation should allow the removal of hair for approved veterinary reasons. Legislation should allow tail grooming. Where there may be a need to trim the end of a tail, that should be permitted if it conforms with the recognised/accepted husbandry practice of not cutting shorter than a line 4 inches below the hock. Regular grooming will remove dead and damaged hairs. Methods of controlling the hair of a horse's tail include bandages, and braided bags/nets.

A horse's tail is a versatile physical feature. A tail is more than a flyswatter. Tails are vital communication centres for horses, relaying messages about moods, health, energy and locomotion. It telegraphs messages about an animal's well-being; as a protective shield, it assists in temperature regulation and safeguards delicate reproductive structures against environmental onslaught; as a mechanism of balance, it subtly influences the alignment of the horse's hind end. The tail strands are made of hardened (keratinized) protein. A tail hair consists of three layers; an inner core; the middle cortex layer comprised of long, twisted protein strands; and a thin protective outer covering. Genetic factors combine with environmental influences to determine which horses have rough, coarse, protective tail hair. Horses relate through body language and it is one of their most expressive "talking" parts. It is used to communicate information about their physical and emotional states within the herd and between horse and rider.

[A horse that swishes its tail from side to side in an agitated manner is not pleased with what he's being asked to do, says Katherine Houpt, VMD, PhD –](#)

"The activity is causing it psychological or physical discomfort and the situation should be analyzed to discover the root of the problem."

Hair falling out by the handful could signal the onset of disease or a dietary deficiency and require prompt attention. A tightly clamped tail can be read as an indication of discomfort in the belly or hindquarters.

The British Horse Society and World Horse Welfare guidelines list "freedom from discomfort" as one of the five welfare needs of horses.

The [discussions in the House of Lords on 1st February 1938 into the Docking And Nicking Of Horses \(Prohibition\) Bill](#) are as relevant today as then.

Addressing the Lords, Lord Merthyr raised many points around the questions of legislation to ban the docking of horse's tails. In his presentation, he declared docking of horse's tails was not universally done and that many countries/regions banned its practice while others did not dock tails as a matter of course and good husbandry.

Some of the quotes include –

“Then it is said that the appearance of a horse is improved by docking and its quarters better shown off. That is purely a matter of opinion.”

In relation to the tail interfering with harnesses, Lord Merthyr said: -

“in the Essex ploughing match last summer the prize was won by an undocked horse”

“If there is any difficulty it is simply because of bad harnessing, simply because the traces are too short. In any case, which is the right thing to do—to cut the horse to fit the cart, or to make the cart to fit the horse?”

“Docking is, we say, more or less a fashion. It is demanded by those who want to show horses”.

“They suffer very greatly from the absence of tails; they cannot get proper rest, and they cannot feed properly.”

“In the United States there are over 15,000,000 undocked farm horses.”

“If it is said that it is impossible to drive horses with undocked tails, bearing in mind that they are doing it so much abroad, is it really suggested that English drivers are less skillful than foreign drivers?”

“... if this Bill is passed. It [docking] can be avoided by plaiting and binding together and braiding the hair of the tail. It can be avoided by binding the dock with webbing if necessary.”

“Docking in itself is a small thing, but its effect in removing protection from flies in summer, in deference to an absurd and hideous fashion, is simple torture to the animal so treated.”

Lord Noel-Buxton said –

“Everybody knows that in regard to shire horses and hackneys the standards of the show ring are very strong and would die very hard. But these standards have very often been proved extremely futile.”

“It is said we ought not to pass this Bill because there are other and greater cruelties. That is the old story of the red herring.”

Many vets, trainers, and exhibition/show organisers are against the practice, seeing it as unnecessary and cosmetic. They do not challenge horse owners for fear of losing business. Tails interfering with harnesses is not an excuse for the practice.