

## Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on PE2130: Make it illegal to remove all the hair from a horse's tail

### An overview of issues raised by the petition

The petitioner is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce a ban on the removal of all hair from a horse's tail to leave a bare stump, other than for medical reasons.

### Background

The tail is an extension of the horse's spine. It is made up of two parts: the dock and the skirt. The dock refers to the skin and muscles covering the vertebrae. The skirt refers to the long hairs that fall below the dock. The tail is a key part of a horse's anatomy and provides several functions. It is important to balance and temperature regulation, deters pests by swiping at biting insects, the position and movement of the tail can communicate the horse's mood.

### Existing legislation

The [Docking and Nicking of Horses Act \(1949\)](#) prohibited the docking of horse's tails in the UK - apart from if the docking or nicking is necessary for the health of the horse because of disease or injury to the tail.

Within the Act, 'docking' means the deliberate removal of any bone or any part of a bone from the tail of a horse. 'Nicking' means the deliberate severing of any tendon or muscle in the tail of a horse.

Apart from animal testing and research, animal welfare is a devolved policy area. While the practice of docking is illegal in Scotland as in the rest of the UK under the 1949 Act, it is still permitted in some other countries including Luxembourg, Spain and some states in the US.

Horses are protected animals under the [Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#), which includes general offences such as causing a protected animal unnecessary suffering or carrying out a prohibited procedure on an animal.

The [2006 Act](#) repealed section 1 of the [Docking and Nicking of Horses Act \(1949\)](#). However, Section 20 of the [2006 Act](#) states, regarding mutilation, a person commits

an offence if the person carries out a prohibited procedure on a protected animal or causes a prohibited procedure to be carried out on a protected animal. Section 20(4) specifies that references to the carrying out of a prohibited procedure on an animal include a procedure which involves interference with the sensitive tissues or bone structure of the animal. Thereby, including docking and nicking.

Section 30 of the [Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#) permitted Scottish Ministers to make codes of practice for protected animals. The [Welfare of equidae: code of practice](#) was published in 2009. This Code covers all domesticated equidae for which a person is responsible including all horses, ponies, donkeys and hybrids. The code provides a practical guide to owners and keepers and covers topics such as suitable environment, diet, protection from disease amongst other welfare considerations. However, it does not include anything specific on tail hair removal.

## Horse Welfare in Scotland

Clydesdale horses are a breed of draft horse that originated in Lanarkshire, Scotland. Breeders developed Clydesdales for draft work on the local farms. Traditionally, docking in draft horses was to prevent the tail from getting stuck in harness equipment.

There have been substantive studies on the welfare impacts of docking a horse's tail, such as [Tail docking in horses: a review of the issues](#). These studies have found that there are negative welfare implications caused by docking including pain, insect harassment, hygiene issues, impaired communication and reproduction.

Although docking is illegal in Scotland, there are no specific legal restrictions relating to removing hair from a horse's tail. Campaigners have suggested that removing all the hair from a horse's tail can have some similar welfare impacts to docking.

A Sunday Post article on 5 January 2025 discussed this petition. Within it, [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals \(PETA\)](#) commented that "horses depend on their tails for balance, to communicate with herd mates and to protect themselves from flies and other biting insects. Clipping the hair on their tails can interfere with these important functions and should be done when medically necessary." [World Horse Welfare](#), in the same article, raised similar views, suggesting that shaving of a horse's tail for aesthetic reasons is not ethical.

Within the same article the Scottish Government are quoting as saying: "Given the importance of the tail to equine wellbeing, the complete removal of a horse's tail hair is a procedure that we do not support or recommend."

The [petitioner has raised the issue](#) as they claim some horse breeders attempt to present their horses in a historic manner. The petitioner suggests that as docking is now illegal in Scotland, they may remove all the hair from the tail leaving the bare stump for aesthetic reasons.

The Scottish organisation [Animal Concern](#) have written a [letter](#) to the [Clydesdale Horse Society](#) raising concerns about the promotion of shaving tails, accusing the society of putting on workshops to teach others how to do it. Following the letter,

Animal Concern [collected the views of other organisations](#) on the issue.

Animal Concern, and [the petitioner](#), suggest that there are alternatives to removing tail hair such as braiding or bandaging which keeps the hair out of harm's way and can be undone easily allowing the tail to function naturally.

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21st January 2025

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

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