

The HKVA Policy on Surgical Alteration to the Natural State of Animals

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Surgical alterations to the natural states of animals are acceptable only if they are demonstrably necessary for the welfare of the animals concerned. Performance of these procedures for purely cosmetic reasons is unacceptable.
- 1.2 It must be recognised that veterinary opinion is dynamic and that particular surgical procedures should be reviewed frequently, based on veterinary, scientific and ethological considerations and not solely on sentiment or economics or influenced by bias. During such revision the following factors should be considered:
 - the probability of undesirable events occurring without surgical prophylaxis;
 - the prognosis regarding the success of the prophylactic procedure;
 - the procedure must be carried out with due regard to current surgical principles, anaesthesia and husbandry practice;
 - the availability of alternative non-surgical procedures that provide superior or equivalent prophylaxis and;
 - the procedure should result in minimal deleterious side-effects.
- 1.3 Where surgical intervention is necessary as a result of physical characteristics produced by breeding, the veterinary profession has an obligation to bring this to the attention of breeders, to strongly recommend desexing of these animals, to encourage breeders to use their skills to return animals to a natural physiognomy and attempt to change factors such as breed standards that encourage propagation of undesirable traits.
- 1.4 In circumstances where existing management practice, breeds of animals and environment have dictated the need for a procedure to be performed for the future welfare of the animal, the profession should critically examine the management practices that have necessitated the procedure and where necessary give advice on systems of breeding management that avoid the need for such compromises in animal welfare.
- 1.5 Procedures that are normally unacceptable may be performed in certain specific conditions for therapeutic reasons on the advice of a veterinarian, e.g. ventriculochordectomy, pinna (ear) surgery. Euthanasia of a pet should be a last resort, but irresponsible owners should not be encouraged by the availability of these procedures.

- 1.6 Veterinary surgeons have an obligation to educate the general public to their responsibilities as owners and to the fact that animals are sentient beings, not simply objects for self-gratification or adornment.

2.0 HKVA Policy on Specific Surgical Procedures

2.1 Debarking of Dogs (Ventriculochordectomy)

2.1.1 The HKVA believes that debarking of dogs should be performed only for veterinary reasons or as an alternative to euthanasia.

2.1.2 The operation should be performed by a veterinarian with full knowledge of all the circumstances relevant to the animal's health, welfare and environment. The veterinarian must be satisfied that the only other alternative is euthanasia of the animal.

The operation must be performed under anaesthesia and with adequate post-operative care.

2.2 Tail Docking and Ear Cropping of Dogs

2.2.1 Cosmetic tail docking and ear cropping of dogs are unnecessary unjustifiable surgical alterations and are detrimental to the animal's welfare.

2.2.2 The HKVA therefore recommends that:

- (i) tail docking requirements be phased out of the relevant breed standards and
- (ii) Government of the HKSAR and animal welfare organisations work together to have tail docking and ear cropping declared to be illegal acts except where performed for therapeutic reasons.

2.3 Claw Removal in Dogs and Cats

2.3.1 Dogs: This procedure is acceptable only where, in the opinion of the veterinary surgeon, injury to the animal is likely to occur during normal activity. The removal of dew claws in certain breeds of dog where they protrude from the limb and are likely to become caught and torn is justifiable and even advisable. It is not acceptable if carried out solely for the convenience of the owner.

2.3.2 Cats: The removal of claws, particularly those that are weight bearing, to preclude damage to furnishings, is not acceptable, unless the only alternative is euthanasia. Scratching posts should be provided for cats.