
PRESS RELEASE

WSAVA Condemns Physical Alteration of Animals for Cosmetic or Behavioural-Control Reasons in new Position Statement

Urges country veterinary associations and kennel clubs to develop similar guidance

The World Small Animal Veterinary Association ([WSAVA](https://www.wsava.org)) has produced a Position Statement, expressing its opposition to the physical alteration of an animal's body for cosmetic or behavioural-control reasons. It also calls on veterinary teams to educate their clients regarding the harm that these procedures can cause and counsel them as to how to improve their animals' welfare and living conditions.

With 'cosmetic mutilations' a growing problem in many parts of the world, even in countries where they are illegal, such as the UK and many European countries, the WSAVA's Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) has prepared the Position Statement to highlight the problem and support the many national veterinary associations which have already initiated their own campaigns. It also hopes to encourage other associations and kennel clubs to phase out breed standards that support cosmetic mutilation and, instead, to take a health-focused approach to these standards.

In its Statement, the WSAVA expresses concern at the prioritization of convenience surgeries and cosmetic alterations over creating good behavioural, physical and emotional states for the animals concerned. It says this demonstrates a lack of recognition of the intrinsic value of animals as sentient beings and sends the message that they are commodities to be altered and exploited in line with human preferences.

The Statement also confirms the WSAVA's opposition to onychectomy, devoicing, tail

docking, ear cropping and other cosmetic surgeries. It says that, where procedures such as tail docking are deemed medically necessary (for example as a response to recurrent tail injury or disease), appropriate anaesthesia and pain control must be utilized and the procedure performed by a veterinarian.

Neutering and permanent identification for the purpose of returning lost animals, such as microchipping or ear tipping, are exempt because of the associated welfare benefits to both some individual animals, and to population management. In all cases, however, a cost-benefit analysis should be performed to ensure evidence-informed and rationalized clinical decisions are made.

Dr Heather Bacon OBE, Chair of the WSAVA AWC, explained: “Elective surgeries should not be performed simply to alter an animal’s appearance or behaviour based on human preferences or tradition. A robust cost-benefit analysis and application of the evidence is always necessary to ensure the best health and welfare outcomes for our companion animals.

“All veterinarians have an ethical obligation to act in the best interests of their patients. We can all improve animal health and welfare outcomes by demonstrating leadership and evidence-based practice on these contentious issues, and by proactively engaging with communities to normalize and promote the value of healthy cats and dogs with intact toes, ears, tails and voices. We hope our Position Statement will support colleagues around the world in achieving this.”

The WSAVA Position Statement can be reviewed here:

The WSAVA’s Animal Welfare Committee works to make animal welfare an everyday consideration for small animal practitioners and to ensure that WSAVA is a proactive and respected partner within international welfare circles by combining advocacy with mutual respect and consensus building. Its Global Guidelines for Companion Animal Welfare are available for free download from the WSAVA website in a range of languages at <https://wsava.org/global-guidelines/animal-welfare-guidelines/>

The work of the Committee is generously supported by [The Purina Institute](#) and [FurryTail](#).

Note to editors:

About the WSAVA

The WSAVA represents more than 200,000 veterinarians worldwide through its 116 member associations and works to enhance standards of clinical care for companion animals. Its core activities include the development of WSAVA Global Guidelines in key areas of veterinary practice, including pain management, nutrition and vaccination, together with lobbying on important issues affecting companion animal care worldwide.

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