



16 December 2024

Dr Nancy de Briyne  
Executive Director  
Federation of Veterinarians of Europe

Giovanbattista Guadagnini, President  
Dr Annalisa Scollo, Senior Vice President  
European Association of Porcine Health Management

Dear Dr de Briyne, Dr Guadagnini and Dr Scollo

### EU legislation on the tail docking of pigs and enrichment materials

The undersigned organisations are aware of and warmly welcome the 2019 FVE and EAPHM very helpful position paper that stresses the need to move away from tail docking.

Commission audit reports show that in many Member States the vast majority of pigs continue to be tail docked. Moreover, in many farms pigs are not provided with effective enrichment; they are simply given metal chains and/or some plastic objects.

It is now 30 years since the EU laws banning the routine tail docking of pigs and requiring them to be given effective enrichment materials came into force. We feel it would greatly help if the pig veterinary profession could mark this anniversary by impressing upon pig farmers, Member State competent authorities and the European Commission the importance of complying with and enforcing the EU legislation on docking and enrichment.

**We would be grateful for a meeting with FVE and EAPHM to discuss how this important legislation can finally be respected and to hear what we as NGOs can do to help the veterinary profession in this respect.**

We appreciate that some countries, like the Netherlands, are in fact now working on action plans and on veterinary welfare checks on the farm. We would be grateful if you could tell us in the meeting what is already being done within Member State veterinary organisations.

The FVE/EAPHM position paper contained many helpful recommendations, for example that an advisory body be set up to support pig veterinarians in helping farmers to stop routine docking. Your paper suggests that 'a multi-country practitioners group could be established who have successfully moved farms towards raising pigs with intact tails and who are willing to support other veterinarians with technical advice around changing husbandry, housing and feeding'.

The position paper was adopted unanimously by the FVE General Assembly on 8 October 2019. As it is five years since adoption of the position paper we wonder if this would be an appropriate time for FVE and EAPHM to assess whether further steps are needed to support implementation of their recommendations?

The issues of tail docking and enrichment are receiving considerable attention. Brill has just published a multi-author book on [Tail-biting in pigs](#). In its 2022 Scientific Opinion on the welfare of pigs EFSA concluded that tail docking 'is not necessary if husbandry practices and management are appropriate' and recommended that 'tail docking should not be performed'. EFSA identified the following factors as important to prevent tail biting: the provision of enrichment materials such as straw, increased space allowance, and low levels of ammonia.

In addition, EFSA recommended that 'All pigs should be provided with effective enrichment'. EFSA concluded that:

- 'it is 90–100% certain that straw, hay, silage or other loose organic substrates are more effective in reducing tail biting than enrichment materials which are suspended from a ceiling or fixed to a wall.
- it is 66–100% certain that a reduction in tail biting can be achieved in undocked pigs if they are offered 20 g per day of straw or similar substrate. However, quantities that are larger (e.g. up to 400 g/pig per day) are more effective.
- it is 66–100% certain that the effects of tail biting outbreaks can be mitigated by using attractive organic substrates'.

The FVE/EAPHM position paper stresses that a veterinarian should only issue a certificate indicating that tail docking is permissible when there is 'evidence of tail biting following appropriate and sufficient enrichment material being present and after verification that the farmer has made corrective changes e.g. housing, climate, diet or stocking density. When all these conditions are fulfilled, the veterinarian can write the certificate, according to the rules of certification, to allow tail docking for a **defined time period** and for a **defined group** of pigs'.

We fear that some veterinarians may be regularly providing certificates without respecting the strict requirements set out in the position paper. This includes veterinarians whose clients do not themselves produce piglets but who buy weaners from farmers who produce piglets. We urge FVE and EAPHM to remind veterinarians of the strict position regarding the issuing of certificates set out in the position paper.

Yours sincerely

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**Please reply to:**

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