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*Literature Review on the Welfare Implications of*  
***Ear Cropping-Dogs***  
(March 13, 2013)

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## THE ISSUE

Some breeds of dogs in the United States customarily have their ears reduced with a blade or scissors to modify their shape and, in some cases, allow a naturally drooping ear to stand upright. Cropping is performed when dogs are between 6 and 12 weeks old depending on breed and body condition. In larger breeds, after surgery the ears are positioned with tape, bandages or other devices to encourage an upright position.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Well-controlled studies addressing the animal welfare implications of cropping dogs' ears do not exist. However case studies support certain risks associated with the procedure.

## WELFARE CONCERNS—RISKS

**General anesthesia**—Cropping should always be carried out under full anesthesia, which itself has associated risks.<sup>4</sup>

**Postoperative Care**—Dogs will experience some discomfort during healing, stretching, re-taping and bandaging, and other manipulations after surgery. Some will need their ears bandaged or taped upright for days to months, and they may be isolated from other dogs during this period.

**Potential Complications**—As for any incision, cropped ears may become infected. Cropped ears may also fail to stand or have a distorted shape or position potentially leading to subsequent operations.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

## REASONS GIVEN FOR THE PRACTICE

**Animal Benefits**—It has been suggested that dogs with cropped ears are less likely to suffer from infections of the ear canal. Although the development of some serious infections has been linked to the presence of a heavy hanging ear<sup>8</sup>, there is no evidence that cropping prevents or successfully treats these infections. It has also been suggested that cropping avoids later ear injury<sup>9</sup> or improves hearing, but no evidence is available to substantiate these claims either.

**Human Benefits**—Ear cropping produces an alert expression in dogs used for security or guard work and may contribute to the distinctive appearance of a pedigree breed.<sup>10</sup>

## LEGISLATION AND ACCEPTABILITY

The American Kennel Club supports owners who choose to crop: “...*ear cropping, tail docking, and dewclaw removal, as described in certain breed standards, are acceptable practices integral to defining and preserving breed character and/or enhancing good health.*”<sup>11</sup> However, dogs with cropped ears may not compete in United Kingdom Kennel Club events.<sup>12</sup>

Many veterinary organizations, in addition to the AVMA, oppose cosmetic cropping including the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA),<sup>13</sup> Canadian Veterinary Medical Association

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(CVMA)<sup>14</sup> and Australian Veterinary Association.<sup>15</sup> Individual veterinarians differ in their perspectives (e.g., letters<sup>9,16,17,18</sup>).

Cropping has been deemed unacceptable in the United Kingdom for more than a century<sup>19</sup> and is currently prohibited in Australasia and most European and Scandinavian countries.

## SUMMARY

Ear cropping is a cosmetic procedure with potential negative outcomes for the animal.

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