

Tail biting and tail docking



Welfare concern

Tail biting

- Is an abnormal behaviour, involving the biting of pig tails by penmates, resulting in tail injuries;
- Is a sign of stress, usually caused by inadequate environmental conditions and management practices;
- Causes pain, and indicates reduced animal welfare in both biter and bitten pigs.

Tail docking

- Aims to reduce tail biting;
- Causes pain, fear and frustration in pigs;
- Is banned as a routine procedure in the EU;
- May be carried out only if there is evidence of previous tail lesions and after all known risk factors have been addressed.

Legal requirements



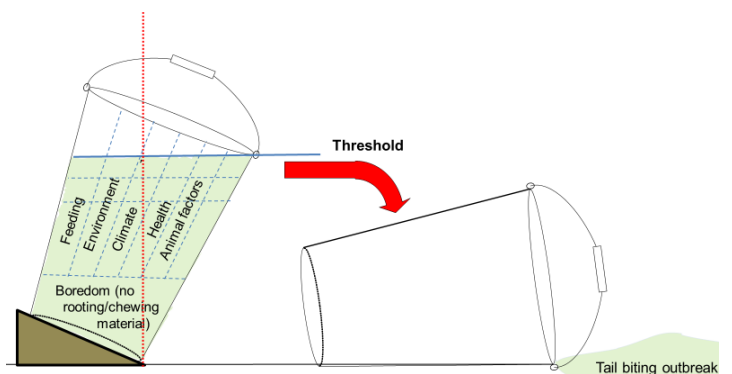
Council Directive **2008/120/EC** states:

"Neither tail-docking nor reduction of corner teeth must be carried out routinely but only where there is evidence that injuries to sows' teats or to other pigs' ears or tails have occurred. Before carrying out these procedures, other measures shall be taken to prevent tail biting and other vices, taking into account environment and stocking densities. For this reason inadequate environmental conditions or management systems must be changed." {in Annex I, Chapter I, point 8}

Risk factors for tail biting

Tail biting is a multi-factorial problem, filling up a 'cumulative risk bucket'. At a certain point, the bucket overflows, and tail biting starts.

'CUMULATIVE RISK BUCKET'



The main **six risk factors** that go in the risk bucket are inadequacies in:

- Environmental enrichment
- Thermal comfort and air quality
- Health status
- Competition over resources
- Diet
- Pen structure and cleanliness



Six focus areas for inspections

Relevance for pig welfare in conjunction with welfare indicators



ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

- Pigs need enrichment materials to fulfil their needs for rooting, sniffing, biting and chewing.
- If these needs are not met, they get bored and frustrated.

Suitability of material

Signs of enrichment use



THERMAL COMFORT AND AIR QUALITY

- Pigs need to be kept within their thermal comfort zone and preferably have the ability to regulate their microclimate behaviourally.
- Maintaining good air quality and suitable lighting conditions are also important in keeping stress and tail biting levels low.

Huddling, shivering; panting

Fouling



PEN STRUCTURE

- Pigs use different areas of the pen for different behaviours (resting, feeding, defecation).
- A dirty environment, especially in the feeding and resting area, reduces comfort and stresses the pigs.

Fouling



HEALTH STATUS



- Good overall health is one of the best ways to reduce tail biting. A pig in poor health is a stressed pig.
- Preventive measures include setting up a general herd health plan together with a veterinarian, and to implement protocols to treat sick pigs and maintain biosecurity.

Mortality

Lameness

Diarrhoea

Runts



DIET

- Pigs need feed of adequate quality and quantity.
- They also need a sufficient quantity of fresh, good quality water.

Body condition

Diarrhoea

Access to water

COMPETITION OVER RESOURCES

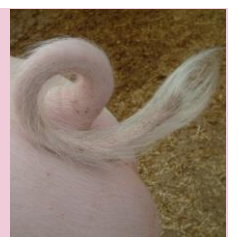


- Pigs prefer to forage, eat and rest simultaneously.
- Therefore, there should be enough space and resources for the pigs to allow synchronized behaviour and thereby avoid competition that can lead to tail biting.

Skin lesions









Success in **keeping pigs with intact tails** is a **win-win situation** for farmer and animals:

- The pig's pain, fear and frustration are reduced.
- Improved health and reduced antibiotic use.
- Economic benefits, also due to higher carcass weights and less condemned or trimmed carcasses.
- Good for the pig farming industry's reputation.



Welfare indicators for inspections

For assessment of (the risks for) tail biting 







FOCUS AREA	INDICATOR	SHORT DESCRIPTION	INDICATOR FACTSHEET
Tail biting and tail docking 	Tail injuries	Tails are either scored as intact, or having minor/major wounds.	https://edepot.wur.nl/513891
	Tail docking	Tails are scored as intact or being shortened.	https://edepot.wur.nl/513889
Environmental enrichment 	Suitability of material	A non-exhaustive list of enrichment materials is provided, categorized as: 'Optimal', 'Suboptimal' and 'Marginal'.	https://edepot.wur.nl/513895
	Signs of enrichment use	Provided enrichment material is inspected for signs of usage, cleanliness, accessibility.	https://edepot.wur.nl/520568
Comfortable climate 	Huddling, shivering; panting	To detect signs of heat and cold stress, pigs are observed for huddling, shivering, panting.	Under construction
	Fouling (also: "Pen structure and cleanliness") 	Pigs are either scored as clean or dirty according to the proportion of the body side soiled.	https://edepot.wur.nl/513892
Health status 	Mortality	The percentage of mortality is calculated.	Under construction
	Lameness	Pigs are either scored as not/slightly lame or severe lame.	https://edepot.wur.nl/513876
	Diarrhoea (also: "Diet") 	Diarrhoea will be assessed based on visible and fresh dung on the floor of the pen.	Under construction
	Runts	Runts are recorded, based on body size, visibility spine, sunken flanks and bristles.	Under construction
Competition over resources 	Skin lesions	Pigs are either scored as having no/mild skin lesions or severe skin lesions.	https://edepot.wur.nl/513896
Diet 	Body condition	Scores of body condition of pigs; pigs are either in good or in poor condition (lean).	https://edepot.wur.nl/514219
	Access to water	Drinkers are checked for functionality and cleanliness. Further, the number of drinking places is assessed.	https://edepot.wur.nl/516920

All indicator factsheets "Tail biting and tail docking": <https://edepot.wur.nl/513360>

Legal requirements

Related to the six focus areas for inspections



<p>Environmental enrichment</p> 	<p>Council Directive 2008/120/EC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ "(...) pigs must have permanent access to a sufficient quantity of material to enable proper investigation and manipulation activities, (...), which does not compromise the health of the animals." {Annex I, Chapter I, point 4} ✦ "When signs of severe fighting appear the causes shall be immediately investigated and appropriate measures taken, such as providing plentiful straw to the animals, if possible, or other materials for investigation. (...)." {Annex I, Chapter II, point D3}
<p>Comfortable climate</p> 	<p>Council Directive 98/58/EC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ "Air circulation, dust levels, temperature, relative air humidity and gas concentrations must be kept within limits which are not harmful to the animals." {Annex, 10} ✦ "Animals kept in buildings must not be kept either in permanent darkness or without an appropriate period of rest from artificial lighting. (...)." {Annex, 11} <p>Directive 2008/120/EC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ "Pigs must be kept in light with an intensity of at least 40 lux for a minimum period of eight hours per day." {Annex I, Chapter I, point 2}
<p>Health status</p> 	<p>Council Directive 98/58/EC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ " (...) sufficient number of staff who possesses the appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence." {Annex, 1} ✦ "All animals kept in husbandry systems in which their welfare depends on frequent human attention shall be inspected at least once a day. (...)." {Annex, 2} ✦ " (...) sick or injured animals shall be isolated in suitable accommodation with, where appropriate, dry comfortable bedding." {Annex, 4}
<p>Competition over resources</p> 	<p>Council Directive 2008/120/EC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ For amount of floor area available to each weaner or rearing pig kept in a group, see Article 3, 1a ✦ "(...). Where pigs are fed in groups and not ad libitum (...), each pig must have access to the food at the same time as the others in the group." {Annex I, Chapter I, point 6} ✦ "(...) measures must be taken to prevent fighting which goes beyond normal behaviour; (...). When pigs are mixed they shall be provided with adequate opportunities to escape and hide from other pigs." {Annex I, Chapter II, D 1, 2}
<p>Diet</p> 	<p>Council Directive 98/58/EC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ "Animals must be fed a wholesome diet which is appropriate to their age and species (...) to maintain them in good health and satisfy their nutritional needs. (...)" {Annex, 14} ✦ "feeding and watering equipment must be designed constructed and placed so that (...) the harmful effects of competition between the animals are minimised" {Annex, 17} <p>Directive 2008/120/EC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ "All pigs over two weeks of age must have permanent access to a sufficient quantity of fresh water." {Annex I, Chapter I, point 7}
<p>Pen structure</p> 	<p>Council Directive 2008/120/EC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ "The accommodation for pigs must be constructed in such a way as to allow the animals to: (...) adequately drained and clean which allows all the animals to lie at the same time, (...)" {Annex I, Chapter I, point 3}



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